

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

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Diploma Thesis

The Sociolinguistic Concept of Political Correctness And Its Impact on Modern Public English

Sociolingvistický koncept
politické korektnosti
a jeho vliv na moderní veřejnou angličtinu

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Year 2009

*“Let’s not say that there are no differences
between black nad white.*

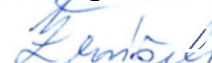
*Let’s say that these differences
do not matter.”*

The Author

I hereby declare that I have written this diploma thesis myself,
using only cited sources which are listed at the end of the thesis.

Prague, 15 November, 2009

Signature



Abstract

This thesis deals with the sociolinguistic concept of political correctness and scrutinizes the impact it has on modern public English language. It describes the changes proposed by the current trend which are meant to erase any offensive and controversial expressions from both public and private speech codes. Brief philosophical, sociological and historical backgrounds of the problem of linguistic discrimination are also provided in order to explain the movement which is aimed at changing the way the people of the European and American civilization express themselves.

Keywords:

political correctness, people-first language, linguistic discrimination, dysphemism, public speech code, language of media, linguistic offence, negative connotation, demonym, ethnonym, endonym, exonym, dysphemism treadmill, sexism, racism, chauvinism, ethnicity, ageism, religion, disabilities, sexual orientation

Tato práce se zabývá sociolingvistickým konceptem politické korektnosti a zkoumá jeho dopad na moderní veřejnou angličtinu. Popisuje změny, které tento současný trend navrhuje za účelem odstranění veškerých kontroverzních výrazů s negativními konotacemi, a to jak z veřejného, tak i ze soukromého jazykového kódu. Práce poskytuje i stručné filosofické, sociologické a historické pozadí problematiky jazykové diskriminace, čímž vysvětluje toto hnutí, které je odhodláno změnit způsob, jakým se lidé z evropské a americké společnosti vyjadřují.

Klíčová slova:

politická korektnost, jazykový koncept „People first“ („Lidé především“), jazyková diskriminace, dysfemismus, veřejný jazykový kód, jazyk médií, negativní konotace, demonyma, ethnonyma, endonyma, exonyma, koloběh dysfemismů, sexismus, rasismus, šovinismus, etnikum, ageismus, náboženství, postižení, sexuální orientace

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor PhDr. Renata Pípalová for much appreciated advice and methodical guidance regarding my research and this thesis as such.

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I. The Introduction

In all the stages of historical development of human civilization, the problem of inequality was present at some point. For all societies, both present and past, it posed an issue to be dealt with. People all over the world and throughout time had to decide their stance towards social justice – from the very first steps of intellectualism, when inequality between people was still considered natural, when it was tolerated, praised and sometimes even enforced, to the current, (post)modern era when the equality-awareness is peaking.

Until now, egalitarian efforts rooted deeply in all the important branches of social science: philosophy, politics, economy, sociology, psychology, and more. They vigorously struggled to change all the established and inveterate stereotypes and kept fighting against all the dangerous prejudices mercilessly. It was no sooner than in the very last decade of the 20th century that these efforts found their way into yet another field of human gnose, dealing with one of the utmost vital parts of the human world: the language. The surprise is not that this happened; the surprise is how huge impact this event had on current language.

This thesis scrutinizes this impact inflicted upon the modern English language. It describes the way it changes under the influence of social justice in order to be morphed into a special means of expression – a politically correct language.

As the linguistic concept of political correctness is a very modern idea, not much has been written on its account so far. There are several papers and newspaper articles by renowned figures of both the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic fields, in which the author of this thesis found inspiration, notable viewpoints and interesting arguments. However, this work is meant to be the

result of the author's own, both theoretical and practical linguistic research of the English language from both the langue and the parole perspectives.

The main goal of this thesis is to overview the most commonly discussed aspects of political correctness and to show the impact they have on the English language in use. A brief description of the socio-historical background of each such aspect is also offered in respective chapters, in order for the reader to better understand these ideological efforts which aim to change the way we express ourselves.

Public English was in the centre of this work's scrutiny, since of all the registers, this one has been by far the most affected by political correctness. Public speeches, whether political or not, newspaper articles, even mere signs and notice boards scattered throughout public buildings like offices and shops, they all have been targeted by groups lobbying for politically correct English; and as such, they served as a good source of information about all the various changes made to the modern form of this language in order to minimize the offence it causes.

Since political correctness is a sociolinguistic concept, both its ideological premise and the presentation of the actual results of the linguistic research requires much explanation based on socio-historical facts.

In the first few chapters, the philosophical viewpoint on the matter and its historical background were introduced in order to explain the idea of equality and social justice, which serve as the basis for the concept of political correctness and must be understood if one wishes to wage a successful war against discrimination. The philosophical-sociological part then smoothly cross the borders of linguistics, discussing in which text types and under what circumstances politically correct language manifests itself.

Then, the actual results of the research, meant to scour the modern English language in search for various changes suggested by political correctness for the purpose of minimizing offence, are presented. They are categorized by whichever social group they are related to, arranged according to the size of the respective groups.

This arrangement is deliberately somewhat disproportionate – a state which logically resulted from both uneven distribution of attention which political correctness pays to various social groups, and of course the actual extent of politically correct language related to each respective group. Especially the latter is quite incomparable, since discriminating expressions in certain aspects – for example racism – are purely lexical, whereas sexism in language manifests itself both lexically and especially morphologically, and thus there was so much more material available regarding this matter. Sexism is by far the the greatest chapter, since of all the major aspects which traditionally served as grounds for discrimination, gender is the only one reflected in the morphology of many languages, English being no exception.

Conversely, most of the evidence of sexist language required only somewhat limited explanation, which is definitely simpler and clearer in comparison to the evidence regarding the said racism. Therefore, the ratio of linguistic evidence and its socio-historical explanation might also seem somewhat uneven in certain chapters. This, however, necessarily stems from the complex unweaving of the origins of the intransparent prejudices and inconsiderate stereotypes which generated harmful connotations present in the current language. On the other hand, such insight felt necessary to understand the perceived offence.

The last chapters deal with the reception of political correctness by sociologists, linguists and notable columnists of the English speaking world; it evaluates the concept's success and prognoses its future course. As a point of interest – and since examples of the politically correct English manifesting itself in public, academical or journalist language are scattered throughout the linguistic part of the thesis – the final chapter also presents a brief insight into texts from popular culture, which through various convenient media reflects honest everyday English used by individuals in their natural environment.

That is to say, actually, that private language is the ultimate goal of the political correctness, for it strives to ban offensive expressions and linguistic discrimination not only from public environment and media, but also – and above all – from the minds of individuals. Conventional media are thus a convenient means of education and popular culture transparently shows various individuals

using the honest and straightforward language which to them is an every-day way of expressing themselves they are used to.

Since the concept is rather recent, many sources of examples, quotations and remarks on its account come from the Internet, the fastest and most dynamic mass medium of our time. The inspiration for this thesis' chapters was found not only among journalist, linguistic, and etymological articles, but many sociological, historical, and even biological information sources were also used, in order to provide the reader with a far broader insight guaranteed by the interdisciplinary approach.

Throughout the whole text, journalist language and public speeches or papers by the defenders of the concept are quoted in order to provide evidence of the promoted politically correct newspeak, whereas information outsourced from academical and scientific texts helps to support the explanation of both the new lexicon and the origins of the discrimination of the respective social groups. Etymological and other dictionaries were also a good source to search for facts about the origins and the development of various words, which helped to bring some light to the matter of why certain expressions are considered offensive and some are not.

Critical reception and remarks on political correctness were quoted from articles by linguists, sociologists and notable columnists, whereas – for the purpose of the evaluation of the concept's success – the evidence of the manifestation of the politically correct language in popular culture was deliberately searched for in rather low-brow genres and works of art in order to show just how far and how deeply the problem managed to reach.

In the appendices, a couple of historical timelines and graphical interpretations of certain sociological aspects related to political correctness are presented in order to show the distribution of the attention paid to matters of discrimination throughout time and around the world.

II. The Sociological-Philosophical Background

II.1 The Philosophical Premise of Equality

Equality is the utmost important theme and purpose of political correctness. If we take a look at the problem of equality from the historical point of view, we will be able to observe an increasing amount of interest which prominent civilizations took in this matter. To familiarize with the history of mankind's pursuit of equality is vital to understanding today's keen interest in it.

Little is known about prehistoric societies, since there simply are no contemporary written documents available – these are usually the best, most valid and most precise sources of a society's social functioning. It is possible to track the development of social opinions from the point of the invention of elaborate writing systems (that we managed to decipher) and, most crucially, from the point when social justice first got into the centre of attention of the then thinkers.

The earliest (preserved to this day and deciphered) sophisticated documents concerning social matters come from the second phase of Ancient Greek philosophy, the most influential and informative being the works written by the two most prominent classics, Plato and Aristotle (roughly the fourth and third century BCE, respectively). They both lived in a well-established direct democracy based on excessive slavery. This state was not only widely tolerated; it was desirable, as slaves presented very cheap workforce and tools of trade. Slaves were hardly considered human beings: they were simply treated as instruments and little thought was devoted to their well-being. The position of women in Ancient Greece was only slightly better. We can only estimate that civilizations preceding Ancient Greece, which showed next to no interest in people of different

conditions becoming equal, took similar stance towards slavery. In fact, the earliest records of slavery can be traced to the Code of Hammurabi (ca 1760 BCE), and the Holy Bible, which refers to it as an established institution as well.

The third phase of Ancient Greek philosophy included the works of Epictetus, a Hellenistic late stoic, who was born as a slave, gained no formal education whatsoever, but managed to impress his master with his sophisticated opinions to that extent that he freed Epictetus from slavery. Epictetus's thoughts concerned mainly the equality of all people; he was one of the first thinkers to publicly claim that slavery was not natural in any way. The year was approximately 90 CE.

Speeches and works condemning slavery in the ancient times were the first attempts to change the situation of social matters in the history. These attempts, however, were practically futile, since excessive slavery was the vital centre of both lots of ancient economies and many more civilizations to come in the Middle Ages. It took almost 2000 years since the first public speeches of thinkers who considered slavery to be unnatural, for the first attempts of its abolishment to come.

Portugal was the first country to abolish slavery on its mainland territory and its possessions in India (but not those in Brazil and Africa) in 1761. Not only was Portugal the first country to do so, it was also the only country to do this as early as in the 18th century (France abolished slavery in 1794, but it was re-legalized in 1804 only to be abolished definitely in 1848). Other major European colonists followed Portugal's example in the next century, the most prominent being Spain in 1811, the British Empire in 1833, the United States no sooner than 1865, and Cuba with Brazil being the last in 1886 and 1888, respectively.

Other major historical milestones in mankind's pursuit of equality included the following:

- **Equality before fate** – The Hellenistic era of Ancient Greece was intellectually advanced enough to start discarding the classical pantheon of mythical gods (counting tens of higher and hundreds of lesser deities), but there was still a couple of hundred years left before the arrival of monotheism in the country. Contemporary philosophers who grew more or less religiously detached began claiming that ordinary people should abandon their constant fear of capricious

gods, who were believed to control all aspects of human life and death. One does not have the power to change fate and it would be a folly even to try. Therefore, according to stoicism, people should live their lives as best as they could, with restraint being the order of the day and the key to a happy life.

- **Equality before God** – Since the spread of monotheism and through the Middle Ages, the intellectual power (and significant political power as well) was held prominently by the hands of the Catholic Church, which officially claimed that people (despite all the uneven conditions, backgrounds and positions) were equal before the God. This ideology, which was pivotal to the Roman-Catholic teaching, endured even through the Renaissance era.

- **Equality before other people** – The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century presented a new idea of power equality of all people. The Enlightenment era, albeit still wholly Catholic, was secular enough to draw the attention away from religious matters to political issues, and thus it centered around the famous tripartite motto of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” (meaning “*liberty, equality and fraternity*”). The pivotal document of the revolution was the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789.

- **Equality before law** – Modern liberal conceptions, which also have their roots in the Age of Enlightenment, rejected many foundational assumptions that dominated in previous philosophical and mainly political ideologies, such as the divine right of kings, the hereditary status of monarchs and established religion. Tolerance was the order of the day: precisely, as stated by John Gray in his *Two Faces of Liberalism*: “*the tolerance of different beliefs and of different ideas as to what constitutes a good life*”¹.

- **Equality of races** – The first loud egalitarian attempts to promote the equality of all races were heard at the end of the 19th century. However, their achievements were small and the opposition to racism was not revived until the 1920s. Forceful argumentation against racism gained strength during the Harlem Renaissance in

¹ Gray (2008), pg. 63.

the 1960s and the opposition peaked under the influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His most famous speech called “*I Have a Dream*”, demanding the end of discrimination, was delivered on the 28 August, 1963 at the Washington D.C. Civil Rights March. In its wake, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize one year later as the youngest person ever.

• **Equality of sexes** – One of the many tasks which needed to be done in order to make women’s political and economical position equal to that of men was granting them the right to vote, thus establishing the women’s suffrage (from Latin “*suffragium*”, originally in the sense “*assistance*” or “*intercessory prayers*”²). The first such attempts came no sooner than in the 18th century, but even those enlightened countries of the time (following the precedent example of Sweden in 1718) were not enlightened enough not to rescind this policy later on. Not even the most democratic countries of today’s world made much haste to realize what now seems as a matter-of course. The dates in which women were granted the vote are spread through the 20th century, including Australia in 1902, United States in 1920, Great Britain in 1928, France in 1945, and Switzerland in 1971. Eastern countries are known for their – to put it mildly – faint interest of treating women equally: for example and comparison, the women in Kuwait were granted their right to vote no sooner than in May 17, 2005 and this amendment to the electoral law barely passed by 35 votes for and 23 votes against (the obstructions being made mostly by the fundamentalist wing of the Kuwaiti parliament)³. Women’s suffrage in Saudi Arabia, to pursue the matter further, is virtually non-existent to this very day. For a comprehensive list of the dates at which countries around the globe granted women their right to vote, please refer to *Appendix #1* of this thesis, which presents up-to-date data (valid as of 2009).

It is the 20th century, nevertheless, that presents the time of eminent interest in the equality between men and women. However, it was no sooner than near the end of the second half of that century, than feminist movements successfully arose to fight the political and economical discrimination of women. Since the

² http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/suffrage?view=uk

Note: specific information about each electronic source can be found in the Literature list at the end of this thesis.

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4552749.stm

very last years of the second millenium until today, modern public language has been under the scope of the feminist egalitarian approach.

• **Equality of opinions and preferences** – Though the egalitarian ideology in the first half of the 20th century wanted to place society above the needs of an individual, recent development of western democracy aims to go the other way round. Postmodern era attempts to surpass the objectivity of truth and science (pursued and celebrated by critically rational and neo-positivist schools of thought at the beginning of the 20th century), and puts greater emphasis on subjective and emotinal viewpoints of an individual. Thus, much has been done so far for the democratic principles of free speech, personal freedom, the right of free choice, the right to be a priori respected as a human being, etc. Also, homosexuality began to claim its place and its strife for rights to equal treatment – most successfully in the Euro-American civilizations (for example, private homosexuality was a criminal offence in Great Britain up until 1967), far less successfully in Asia and Africa, where it is still legally punishable by death in many countries.

Another matter of preference – this time an intellectual one – is based on the choice of religion. It has been established that all people should be free to choose whatever they want to believe and whatever denomination they want to identify themselves with. The first historical documents recognizing and legally allowing people to profess non-Catholic religion (but with many limitations⁴) were the 1781 and 1782 Edicts of Tolerance issued by the Holy Roman Emperor, Josef II in Austria. Apart from several Asian fundamentalist countries, the religious freedom has been recognized on a much larger scale now – even to the point that recently, there have been struggles for the right not to believe in anything (not to profess any form of theism, that is). Atheism too is now regarded as a tolerated and legitimate stance in most of the world, though there are still many vigorous discussions on that account.

From the list above, it is clear that political correctness deals with minorities – since they are logically more likely to be discriminated – with the obvious

⁴ Blitz (1989), pg. 583.

exception of women because the population ratio favours females rather than males (but women were traditionally treated as a minority, nonetheless). The equality of all the aforementioned groups is now successfully recognized and legally supported with a formidable number of various edicts, declarations and anti-discrimination laws in the majority of Euro-American countries (though it is far from this state in many African and Asian countries). Because of this, language became perhaps the very last refuge where discrimination could manifest itself – that is, until now, the break of the 20th and the 21st centuries, when language got into the centre of attention of political correctness. Its current goal is not only to ban discrimination from society, but to banish it from the minds of individuals and their way of thinking and expressing. Racism and sexism are the two most important issues in the linguistic concept of political correctness, and the strength of recent efforts to create a non-offensive and gender-neutral language is simply unprecedented.

II.2 The Concept

Why the political correctness puts such great emphasis on language can be explained rather easily. Since the thinking of the Euro-American civilization shifted at the beginning of the 20th century with the change of the ruling philosophical paradigm from mentalist to linguistic, political correctness is just a natural response to such development. It is therefore no wonder that when it comes to pursuing democracy, language itself appeared in the centre of political attention as one of the key means – and goals – of such efforts.

Political correctness is a modern trend aimed at creating a non-offensive language, a means of one's verbal expression without crossing the line of socially accepted behaviour. This psycho- and socio- linguistic feature takes the American-originated fight with discrimination to a whole new level, where it continues to ban racism, sexism, and intolerance, to name but a few objectives.

Having said that politically correct language is meant to be carried out through precise changes in modern lexicon (among others), it should be stated right away that such efforts – around which this thesis is centred – are not concerned with terms that are offensive by definition; i.e. insults, profanities, swear-words, foul language, taboo expressions and other expletives traditionally used (and deliberately coined) for the purpose of cursing and derogation.

It is already generally understood that this particular word-stock is not as such suitable and appropriate for public language, and therefore is not subject to the politically correct aspirations. Such terms were already marked as impolite long ago, and thus it would be redundant if they were under the scope of political correctness (notice the intentionally obvious etymological affinity between the words “*political*” and “*polite*”).

What political correctness *does* concern with are words whose original meaning shifted recently and gained (or were discovered to carry) undesirable and harming connotations – mainly regarding sexism, racism, ageism, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudicial thinking. Rather than removing those connotations, political correctness strives to remove the afflicted terms completely and replace them with others.

It is important to mention that the concept of political correctness did not come “from above”, from official language institutes, from groups of expert linguists charged with the supervision of the language. It should also be noted at this point that the politically correct language is not an elaborate and concentrated scheme of a single organization or an interconnected body of activists; the efforts of creating an inoffensive newspeak come from heterogeneous social groups and their various defendants that are usually neither in any relation nor any contact. The concept came “from below”; all the promoted expressions and changes are but propositions – however strongly called for – raised by people who felt uncomfortable with the way modern English treated them. There are several recognizable patterns in the way political correctness changed the language, which could be considered a new set of grammatical and lexical rules. By definition, however, they are not.

Political correctness presents merely a proposed mutation of English, and only slowly find the new expressions their way to final recognition which is carried out

by an entry in official dictionaries. Therefore, adhering to the politically correct way of speaking and writing is not obligatory per se; it does, however, show one's social empathy and awareness, one's respect and understanding for the feelings of the offended groups and one's active will to make an effort to avoid the offence.

On the other hand, considering the Americans' long concentrated concern for protecting democracy and the continually increasing strength of lobbyist groups (especially when it comes to defending one's rights), it may be just a matter of time before politically correct language officially becomes a requested, necessary and strictly guarded way of expression. It does not even have to take long before such time comes.

That is to say, it already happened in politics to a certain degree. Not adhering to the politically correct idiosyncratic newspeak could result in political death of any careless or ignorant public figure in such populist regime as modern representative democracy usually is. It would show that the speaker is indifferent to the offended groups' calls for equal standing and as such would become controversial at best, or rather would be considered impolite and unsuitable for the position at worst. In the latter case, they would be most likely forced by the public to end their career.

Nevertheless, giving the free speech clause, which is one of the vital pillars of democracy, the First Amendment to the American Constitution strictly prohibits both the federal government and the state governments of the United States to restrict speech. They are forbidden from regulating its content, with a few recognized exceptions of defamation⁵ and incitement to riot⁶. The term "*hate speech*" has been coined for the needs of such situations, following the successful expression "*hate crime*"⁷.

According to *The Home Office*, the United Kingdom government department responsible for immigration control, security and order, "*hate crime*" (also known as "*bias-motivated crime*") occur when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her perceived membership in a certain social group. It generally refers to

⁵ <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/media/unfetter/press08.htm>

⁶ http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/18/usc_sec_18_00002101----000-.html

⁷ Stotzer (2007), pg. 3.

*“criminal acts which are seen to have been motivated by hatred of one or more of relevant social conditions”*⁸, which are listed below.

The term *“hate speech”* has been coined to describe any speech intended to degrade a person or a group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language ability, ideology, social class, occupation, appearance, mental capacity and any other distinction that might be considered by some as a liability⁹. In many countries, deliberate use of hate speech is a criminal offence prohibited under the legislation of incitement to hatred, mainly in cases where such speech encourages illegal violence. However, in the USA, even in such cases, instances of incitement only qualify as criminal if the threat of violence is imminent.¹⁰

Therefore, adhering to political correctness can hardly be demanded legally or be punishable by law if infringed. It can be – and aims to be – uplifted to a social standard, though; it wants to become a maxim of politeness that is upheld and appreciated as politeness itself: it is not obligatory, but it became an accepted behaviour, supporting peaceful coexistence of social groups of various backgrounds. Thus, it should not be a stretch to imagine that there have been numerous and continually increasing efforts to display non-offensive language in public. The politically correct English is already in use.

It is therefore vital to study the changes proposed by political correctness in order to know how to eliminate offence and to determine the rational extent to which the contemporary language should change.

II.3 The Background

If we were to trace the origins of political correctness, it would lead us inevitably to the United States of America. This should actually come as no

⁸ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/hate-crime/>

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hate_speech

¹⁰ <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/06/11/america/hate.php>

surprise, as this country began its strife for democracy almost at the very same moment it began its fight for its freedom. Ever since, the history of the USA was full of continual attempts to find new rights for both the Americans and the people of the entire world. Abolishing slavery, fighting for equal rights and equal opportunities for women, learning to respect socio-political minorities, wiping out racism, sexism and all other kinds of discrimination – those all are but a few examples of how this frequently self-described shining beacon of democracy keeps guarding it and sharing it all around the globe, and how it tries to shine even more brightly with every passing generation. The concept of political correctness is just a natural result of such attempts of extending one's rights, the next logical step of the socio-historical evolution of the western civilization.

It is more or less obvious that this concept is historically given. Although the United States were not always the first nation to come up with the aforementioned enlightened thoughts, their united federative nature allowed them to become one of the greatest to pursue them. That is, throughout the period of 19th and 20th century, most of the European countries found themselves in a series of unceasing struggles and wars, and were therefore politically and intellectually disunited, as they are – to some extent - to this very day. The United States, however, as they acquired more land from their previous colonists in the 19th century, kept gaining strength, wealth and population, which all helped the country to establish a solid ground and to sustain the power of a unanimous opinion. Ever since the American Civil War in the second half of the 19th century, the United States – as far as the basic pillars of democracy are concerned – truly correspond to their name. That is, their united voice helps the Americans promote their ideas even more loudly.

Given their long and assiduous effort of proclaiming democratic ideas, the Americans are furthermore interested in the pursuit of political freedom and passing it on to other countries of the world. Interestingly enough, despite the means of everyday communication being global these days, the spreading of such thoughts can be very easily watched happening geographically: from the west to the east. Thus, countries which tend to take up on new American psycho-social trends most prominently are the countries of Western Europe, followed by Central and Southern European countries, etc. The move in question halts its progress

somewhat in Eastern Europe and even less of politically correct thinking can be observed in Southern Asia, where women along with ethnical, religious, and other relevant minorities are far from being treated equally on social levels, not to mention linguistic levels. This is why – of all world languages – modern English presents the best example for this thesis: it is the language where political correctness manifests itself by far the most.

II.4 The Linguistic Background

One of the best means of minimizing offence in language are euphemisms. It is a central aspect of political correctness to scour the current language for all offensive expressions and substitute them with agreeable and inoffensive alternatives which bear no negative connotations. There are plenty of such words in today's English, be they designed either for the purposes of avoiding certain expressions in high-class societies, distorting profanities, lessening the negative sound of unpleasant expressions, or merely enhancing political doublespeak.

In regard to political correctness, euphemisms are meant to replace controversial wordstock and also their direct counterparts – dysphemisms (from Greek *dys* and *pheme*, meaning “*mis-reputation*”), i.e. negative terms which are used intentionally to offend. Politically correct expressions are either newly coined or recruited from previously neutral wordstock, in both cases for the ultimate goal of creating a neutral language. The whole concept does not end with offensive terms being replaced by euphemisms; the main task of political correctness will not be complete until these euphemisms merge into everyday use, until they are considered neutral and not something extraordinary or forced.

This process of amelioration (improving the language culture by implanting euphemisms into it) is continuous and can occasionally repeat itself. When a neutral term gathers some negative connotations and becomes offensive, it is replaced by another term, a euphemism; in the course of time, this euphemism can be so frequent in use that it passes to the level where it is considered neutral (and

no longer perceived as an exceptionally polite term). However, due to some sociological shifts which inspire different perception of the characteristics of the social group depicted by the word in question, the new neutral term can become offensive itself, usually by acquiring the very same connotations as in the case of its predecessor. Thus, the need for a new euphemism arises. This repetitive process of semantic change is called the “*euphemism treadmill*” and was described by W. V. O. Quine. However, it was Steven Pinker who came up with the name of this cycle of pejoration.

For example, the word “*fat*”, when referring to someone’s body stature, is now considered offensive because of the acquired connotations of “*slow, clumsy, lazy, gluttonous*” or even “*stupid*”. The politically correct alternatives are “*obese*” or “*overweight*”. However, since the problem of obesity is increasing – especially in the United States, where 31% of population (some 59 million people) is obese and twice as much is obese or overweight¹¹ – constant attention is devoted to the issue, therefore the corresponding referents are very frequent in use. Therefore, especially the word “*overweight*” is considered less neutral by some and begins to lose its euphemistic effect – mainly because the word denotes it too obviously that a person’s *weight* is *over* the norm. The word is being replaced by “*heavyset*”, an adjective which – according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* – has been recognized as a part of the English lexicon in 1920s (but had not been used to refer to people until recently), denoting something/someone which is “*stout in build*”¹². Presumably, it is only a matter of time before this new euphemism gains the same negative connotations, since it too refers to a person’s heavy weight rather obviously.

Dysphemisms and expressions with negative connotations are not the only parts of the modern English wordstock which political correctness marked for the transformation in order to create a neutral language. There are many words considered inappropriate which are not dysphemisms – especially in case of sexist expressions. These are not neutral, because they are gender-specific: they regard one sex as superior or dominant and gives it unfair advantages and prominence in language.

¹¹ http://www.annecollins.com/weight_health/obesity-rate.htm

¹² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Heavyset>

Political correctness is not globally universal. The reason for this is not only based on the fact that not all countries devote the required attention to the issue of linguistic discrimination, but also from the fact that the countries which do approach the problem differently. The theoretical foundations of the concept stems from the theory of linguistic relativity, also known as the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, which originated in the era of German national romantic philosophy and was embraced and elaborated by namely Wilhelm von Humboldt, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. The main idea of this theory is that the cognitive classification of known phenomena is affected by varying cultural concepts and categories which are intrinsic to different languages, and that the speakers of those languages think and behave differently because of it. As aptly shortened by Edna Andrews, “*language represents thought, and may even control thought*¹³”. This hypothesis suggests it is possible to achieve a cultural change through a linguistic change, or in other words – to substantiate this thesis’s point – if political correctness manages to ban discrimination from the language (from the thinking of people), it will become more feasible to extinguish discrimination altogether.

II.5 The Manifestation

Since a language is a part of everyone’s everyday life, the attempts to promote political correctness can be seen manifesting themselves in a variety of places. To put it simply, it can appear anywhere where language is used.

Despite its name, political correctness is far from being just a matter of politics and it would be unjust to say so. Yet, as always, it is the name from which it is possible to deduce the true meaning of a word. The term “*political*” is derived from Greek “*polis*”, meaning “*a state*” (or a “*city-state*”, to be more precise and

¹³ Andrews (1996), pg. 404.

chronologically accurate). Therefore, anything could be described as being political that referred to the matters of *polis*, or in other words the matters of public life. It would be far more precise to say that the area in which political correctness is pursued, observed and adhered to the most is the public life of a society as a whole, rather than just its political life (bearing in mind that political life is but a fraction of the public life).

That having been said, it is very likely to spot manifestations of political correctness in all kinds of public texts, ranging from political speeches and daily newspapers to popular literature and to mere signs at the door of your physician's.

The following is a list of media where political correctness influenced the language used:

- **Official documents and speeches** – Political language is obviously an area upon which political correctness had the greatest impact. Taking care of the interests and the well-being of their fellow compatriots is the politicians' downright duty and the very reason they are elected for. It is the politicians who make new discrimination-banning laws and who proclaim the importance of creating a politically correct language, and therefore it would be strongly counterproductive if they did not try to minimize offence and stay clear of prejudicial terms. The chance of spotting a politically incorrect term or a means of expression is minute at best.

- **Journalist English** – The language of newspapers and television/radio reporters was subject to these changes as well. Media (and journalist media in particular) are also a public service and as such have to adjust their means of expression according to what the audience demands. Journalists usually follow the proposed rules of the correct newspeak and are the means of spreading the word about it. Since the ultimate goal of all mass media is to reach as broad audience as possible, it is only logical that they would try to comply with the needs and wishes of their consumers, and thus the occurrence of politically incorrect language in this particular area is comparable with that in official documents and speeches.

• **Popular culture (movies and books of fiction)** – The writers' and moviemakers' stance towards political correctness is far from being unambiguous. Sometimes it is pursued, sometimes it is ignored and on several occasions, it is downright ridiculed. In specialized and scientific texts, politically incorrect language is less likely. In fiction, however, using politically incorrect language may be done deliberately for the purpose of provoking and of drawing attention to it, which provides the authors with an opportunity to share their opinions on it. Plots may involve characters which use offensive language willingly to insult or characters to which politically incorrect language comes naturally. Especially in the action and comedy genre, the audience may come across such expressions, which could be used for the artistic purpose of building tension or source of humour, respectively. Since movies and books are the most widespread forms of entertainment, their content affects by far the greatest audience.

• **Computer games** – They are a relatively new medium which still continues to gain surprising attention in a rapid pace and which finds it shockingly little challenging to compete with movies and literature when it comes to the most favourite medial pastimes of the Western world. The explanation for that is actually quite simple: this specific branch of entertainment combines many of the most sought-after art forms in a single package; they all are presented visually (and the stories of most of them are narrated with the help of video sequences), they all feature custom-composed music tracks, and – most importantly for this thesis' point – many of them include surprisingly large amounts of texts to read (as a secondary means of the plot narration, they contain additional story information, background history, actual relevant real-life facts, various trivia, etc., not uncommonly summing up to hundreds of pages of text per game). Plus, what really gives computer games the edge over other medial pastimes is the interactivity. Whereas music, literature and films are all just passive forms of entertainment, computer games include all of them and additionally, they actually put the player in charge of what happens. Although their popularity is constantly rising and the amount of money and time people are spending on them matches that devoted to books and movies, they are not comparably widespread and enjoyed as these two other forms of entertainment: so far, there are less players than readers or moviegoers. Nevertheless, there is a large, if rather heterogenous

social aggregate of gamers, unprecedentedly connected by the Internet (especially in case of the MMORPG genre – an acronym for “*massively multiplayer online role-playing games*”) to the extent that they managed to create their own particular culture with their own remarkably idiosyncratic newspeak, swarming with neologisms, blends and acronyms, many of which found their way to much broader society and everyday language.

Anyway, since the action genre (which is broader in case of games, for it produces more titles in a year than how many action movies are shot during the same period) is known for containing vast amount of rough, violent and socio-pathological materials, it is very likely to spot politically incorrect expressions there. Given the extra added feature of the player’s control over the events and even the unprecedented possibility of creating one’s own and unique protagonist to go through the story of the game with, it is far easier for them to relate to the character they’re playing as and to bond with them even more tightly than in the case of movies and books, thus making the potential impact (in whichever direction) on the players’ minds even deeper.

- **Signs and notice boards** – They are a means of communicating short, publicly available pieces of information, warnings, orders, requests, restrictions, etc. In order to convey these messages, they should definitely use politically correct language. Their observing its rules, however, depends on the nature of the environment in which they are displayed. In upscale sort of places for upper-class customers or visitors (city restaurants, hotels, educational facilities) where the non-offensive policy awareness is high, adhering to politically correct language is very likely. On the other extreme of the service scale (country pubs for local population), the level of its observance may be low and even next to none.

- **Private speech** – Everyday speech of ordinary people in their natural private environments is very difficult to monitor, and the level of adherence to using politically correct language may vary greatly (although, arguably, it somewhat corresponds to the difference between U-English and non-U English). However, the current state of private speech is more or less trustworthily mirrored in all kinds of previously mentioned forms of entertainment (literature, film, computer games, etc.). Although spoken private language is almost impossible to inspect,

its written form is well-accessible on the Internet, where it is recorded in blogs, online forums and their like (although trudging through these online media in a search for relevant information could on some occasions prove rather time-consuming, highly demanding and painstakingly frustrating, because never before have so many people with so little to say said so much to so few).

Regardless, this field presents the very area the efforts to create a politically correct language are trying to reach and change. The main goal will not be achieved with the transformation of the public language of the media and politicians: the task will be accomplished when ordinary people change the way they express themselves. With common folk abandoning prejudicial terms full of harmful stereotypes, the capital idea here suggests that they will also stop *thinking* in a prejudicial and stereotypical way, thus preventing hate speech and discrimination as such. This goal makes the media merely a convenient means of subtle education of people.

It should be noted, that private speech and texts present the utmost target of political correctness. Banishing discrimination and offensive language from the public and the media is simply not enough. Until inconsiderate thoughts and expressions are not erased from the very mind of an individual, the goal of political correctness will not be fulfilled.

III. The Linguistic Research

III.1 Political Correctness and Discrimination

The modern trend of political correctness is a matter of the current *zeitgeist*. This word (borrowed from German and meaning “*the spirit of the time*”¹⁴) refers to the “*general cultural, intellectual, ethical, spiritual or political climate within a nation or even specific groups (both small and larger than a nation, that is), along with the general ambience, morals and sociocultural direction or mood of an era*”¹⁵. Each epoch, of course, has its own *zeitgeist* and the current one pays unprecedented attention to banning discrimination and promoting equality. There is much historical evidence of how past *zeitgeists* viewed the idea of equality.

Homosexuality, for example, is largely condemned by the Holy Bible: Leviticus 18:22 reads “*Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination*”¹⁶ and Leviticus 20:13 states that “*If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads*”¹⁷. Moreover, the Bible, the paramount source of spiritual inspiration and moral codes for large masses of population in the Western world, is the very same book in which we read (Timothy 2:11-12) that “*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.*” and “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*”¹⁸

¹⁴ Joseph (2007).

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeitgeist>

¹⁶ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus+18%3A22&version=NIV>

¹⁷ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus+20%3A13&version=NIV>

¹⁸ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+2%3A11-12&version=NIV>

Thomas Henry Huxley, a 19th century English biologist and evolutionist, was by the standards of his time – by his (rather recent) *zeitgeist* – an enlightened and liberal progressive. In 1871, he wrote the following: “*No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man. And if this be true, it is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our pronathous relative has a fair field and no favor, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites. The highest places in hierarchy of civilization will assuredly not be within the reach of our dusky cousins.*”¹⁹”

In the same time period, a great humanist Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, famous for leading his country through the Civil War and for ending slavery for good, wrote in 1858: “*I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races; that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say, in addition to this, that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.*”²⁰”

Atheists are another minority which is somewhat disfavoured in our *zeitgeist*, not exclusively in fundamentalist countries, but in the liberal United States as well. Although there are several European countries, where atheists actually present the majority of population – mainly the Czech Republic, Estonia and certain parts of Russia, Christianity still has the upper-hand in the majority of the Euro-American civilization, even to the point of having surprising privileges. To present just one example (taken from a book of today’s best-selling prominent British atheist apologist Richard Dawkins²¹), on 21 February 2006, the US Supreme Court ruled (in accordance with the Constitution) that a church in New

¹⁹ Huxley (1871), pg. 36

²⁰ <http://www.classic-literature.co.uk/american-authors/19th-century/abraham-lincoln/the-writings-of-abraham-lincoln-04/>

²¹ Dawkins (2007), pg. 44

Mexico should be exempt from the law against the taking of hallucinogenic drugs, because the members of the *Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal* believe that they can understand God only by drinking hoasca tea, which is a special herbal tea containing the hallucinogenic dimethyltryptamine. They succeeded without even having to provide evidence (which would be next to impossible, anyway). Conversely, there is plenty of medical evidence that cannabis eases the nausea and discomfort of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. However, the very same US Supreme Court ruled in 2005 that all patients who use cannabis for medicinal purposes are vulnerable to federal prosecution (even in the minority of states where such use is legalized).

It is remarkable that the currently so Christian United States of America were not in any way founded as a Christian country. This fact was stated in the terms of a treaty with Tripoli, drafted in 1796 under George Washington and signed by John Adams in 1799: *“As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Musselmen; and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.”*²²

It should be noted that the primary task of political correctness (and all the other movements fighting for the equality of any groups imaginable – those groups which are eligible to be treated equally, that is) is not an eternal one. It has its fixed beginning in the history (presented by the point where the awareness of the particular group in question and its rights was raised sufficiently), and by the same token, it has its desirable end, though reaching it might require the society to go a very long way. However, when the goal is reached (provided it ever is) and an absolute equality is assured for everyone entitled to it, there will be no need for such movements, because – proverbially spoken – when the house is built, one does no longer need the builder.

²² Dawkins (2007), pg. 61.

A poll taken in 1999 by Gallup (a recognized and reliable American public survey organization, regularly conducting public opinion polls in more than 140 countries²³) proved that discrimination is still somewhat alive in the minds of today's ordinary people, albeit subtle and unexpressed²⁴. In this poll, a group of Americans was asked whether they would vote for an otherwise well-qualified presidential candidate if they were a woman, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Afro-American, Mormon, homosexual or atheist. In other words, the survey investigated to what extent a person with ideal requirements for the post (these would most likely include excellent intellectual, political, economical, and diplomatic skills) would be a priori disqualified in the eyes of the voters because of possessing but a single one of the listed (absolutely unrelated) characteristics.

The results went as follows:

a woman	(95% would give the person their vote)
Roman Catholic	(94%)
Jewish	(92%)
Afro-American	(92%)
Mormon	(79%)
homosexual	(79%)
atheist	(49%)

Though the results of the survey seem rather favourable and the numbers would most likely look a bit better today (10 years after the poll was taken), it is clear that there is still some work to be done regarding the fight with discrimination. The ideal results of the survey would of course be 100% in all the categories, meaning that no candidate would be a priori disqualified by possessing any of the listed traits, because they are simply irrelevant. This could very well serve as the motto for political correctness: *"Let's not say that there are no differences between A and B; let's say that these differences do not matter"*.

The list of characteristics chosen for the above-mentioned survey presents two rather surprising facts and two facts which are not surprising at all. Sex and ethnicity are two categories in which discrimination occurred traditionally as far as

²³ <http://www.gallup.com/Home.aspx>

²⁴ Dawkins (2007), pg. 26.

history can tell, and they stand for the two largest “battlefields” when it comes to political correctness.

The first surprise comes with the non-presence of physical disabilities and the nationality aspect in the list. Disabilities are a major area where political correctness is trying to make its point, and the changes proposed to be made to English lexicon are many. The nationality was not included whatsoever because a potential candidate for the post of the President of the United States of America has to be a US citizen. Therefore, foreigners could not even be considered as they would be *eo ipso* disqualified by law.

The second surprise comes with the presence of religious preferences. The citizens of the United States have been growing more spiritual and religious in recent decades: according to a 2007 survey²⁵, 78,4% of adults identified themselves as Christian, whereas only 16,1% described themselves as atheist, agnostic or having no religion. The importance of spiritual faith has been increasing lately and plays an important role in the life of today’s Americans. Religion being included in the survey therefore comes as a bit of a surprise, since it can hardly be considered a matter that would *a priori* disqualify a presidential candidate. It is, however, not the influence of being religious that the authors of the poll were interested in; it was in fact the influence of being irreligious. And clearly enough, as shown in the results, being an atheist in today’s USA bears a considerably negative mark and a social stigma *per se*. It would seem unlikely that – besides the other chauvinistic and xenophobic issues – a *religious* issue would also be mirrored in the efforts of creating a politically correct language. Nonetheless – as will be explained later in a separate chapter – it is.

The above-mentioned Gallup survey clearly suggested the directions which the research of political correctness manifesting itself should take. Studying both public and private texts brought plenty of examples showing how greatly the current English language is changed by modern trends. Originally, only journalist English and the language of newspaper was under the scrutiny of the author’s research, but it turned out that this specific register does not cover the

²⁵ <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/affiliations-all-traditions.pdf>. Retrieved 2008-10-23.

amendments suggested by political correctness exhaustively. And thus the scope of the research broadened in order to include more text types from English language, which would help to discover and present as full-range analysis as possible. Furthermore, selected works of fiction were also scrutinized in order to verify how successful political correctness was in being accepted in private language.

Studying current English language in a search of the manifold influence political correctness has on it uncovered many examples in many areas. As it turned out, there are many expressions discriminating or offensive to several distinct social groups. The results of the research are divided into categories according to groups they are related to, while the individual categories are listed in relation to their estimated size in the English speaking world, mainly the United States of America (since this country is – as explained in the introduction – the cradle of political correctness), estimated to home 307,826,734 residents as of 31th October 2009²⁶.

The main aspects of these aggregates are as follows:

- **gender** – this is a biological aspect, globally universal. The human species has only two genders (everywhere in the world) and one can not choose for themselves which gender they will be when they are born. Only in recent years, the scientific progress and plastic surgery allowed people to change their gender and western legislation actually recognizes this change on an administration level. As far as the physiognomy of a human brain goes, neuroscientists incline towards the general notion that one gender is used to think in a slightly different way and predominantly makes use of different parts of the brain than the other, but this inconsistency does not present justifiable grounds for assuming that one gender is in any way superior than the other. Demography gives a rough estimate of slightly more than 50% of the world's population to be women (thus roughly 160 million women in United States), which makes sexim the hottest topic.

²⁶ <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>

- **ethnicity** – also a biological aspect, but this time it is not globally universal. As in the case of gender, no one can choose their ethnicity, as it is genetically inherited from their parents. Insofar there has been no known way one could change their ethnicity, although in some cases one's ethnicity could be a matter of self-identification. Anthropology suggests there are some mild qualitative or quantitative differences between races (both physical and psychological), but these are believed to be so marginal and insignificant that no justifiable claims of any race's superiority should come of it. The largest ethnic minority in United States are the African Americans (12,8%, thus some 40 million²⁷), but there are of course other ethnic groups. In fact, the USA comprises some 79,8% (roughly 245 million) of "white" people²⁸.

- **disabilities** – another biological (or sometimes psychological) aspect, globally universal. This term denotes people suffering from a serious and life-limiting condition, coming from either injury or illness. Changing this state is obviously desirable, but not always possible. Counting the disabled is actually quite difficult, and thus in 2004 the *World Health Organization* estimated their number to be 100 million moderately or severely disabled worldwide²⁹. According to the *U.S. Bureau of the Census*, there were 37 million disabled in the United States, plus – if one were to add impairments (limitations that fall shortly of being disabilities) – the number would go as high as 51 million³⁰.

- **religion** – out of all other aspects, this is the one and only which is purely intellectual. Although it is true that one is traditionally brought up in the same denomination as their parents, it is usually the person's right to change their religion views according to their own free will (including the option of rejecting all of them). Only in several fundamentalist countries, hostility towards other religions and atheism is openly displayed. According to the latest surveys, some 16,1% (roughly 49 million) of Americans identify themselves as atheists or

²⁷ <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>

²⁸ <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>

²⁹ http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GBD_report_2004update_part3.pdf

³⁰ http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_S1801&-ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_

agnostics³¹, which is the largest religious minority opposing the mainstream Roman Catholics and Protestants denominations.

- **age** – another purely biological aspect, globally universal. The process of aging affects everyone without exceptions and the way it changes one's body and mind is clearly observable, largely documented and inevitable. According to *The World Factbook* by CIA, there are some 39.4 million residents of the United States who are aged 65 or more (an estimate for the year 2009)³².

- **homosexuality** – globally universal aspect (not limited to human species only, actually). As of today, the question whether homosexuality is purely a biological (or genetical, for that matter) issue is still unresolved, because it is only to a limited degree that a person can freely decide on their sexual preference, if at all. What every homosexual can choose, however, is whether or not they would (both privately and publicly) accept their preference and identify themselves as such. Anyway, since many homosexuals live in denial (unwilling to accept what they are) or they accept their homosexuality but do not openly claim it (because of religious or political reasons – mainly in fundamentalist Asian countries), it is almost impossible to count the size of this social group. According to the poll taken on the US Election Day of the 2008 Presidential elections, 4% (roughly 12 million) of the electorate self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual³³.

Political correctness may only attempt to banish specific terms offensive to a certain group when two requirements have been met: 1) the corresponding society's consciousness and awareness about the social group in question has been raised to a level high enough for the group to successfully claim their right to equal treatment, and 2) there are terms in the corresponding society's language in general public use which are considered neutral by the public, but are perceived as offensive and discriminating by members of the respective minority (or the repressed community) and their defendants. The former condition is actually a vital pre-requisite for the latter: a society will never take action to stop using

³¹ <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/affiliations-all-traditions.pdf>. Retrieved 2008-10-23.

³² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>

³³ <http://www.advocate.com/article.aspx?id=41389>

language offensive to a minority if its rights are not recognized and it is not accepted as such. It is simply impossible to make efforts to stop discriminating a social group on a linguistic level, if the group is knowingly being discriminated by the majority on legal and moral levels.

The research unveiled that the changes of the current English language proposed by political correctness are mainly lexical (concerning inappropriate word-stock), but there are also several morphological issues (because English distinguishes genders on the linguistic level when it comes to pronouns and nouns) as well as those which are syntactical (several changes to sentence structure have been suggested in order to highlight certain aspects of the disabled minority). A list of the most important changes is provided in the following chapters, sorted according to whichever social group's discrimination they were motivated by.

III.2 The Problem of Sexism and Gender Issues

Banishing sexism from English language is a continuation of the Euro-American feminist approaches to achieve equal position and treatment of women in a society. Although feminism originated in late 19th century, when it managed to somewhat start fulfilling one of its primary goals – granting women the right to vote and actively participate on their country's politics –, it almost had not been heard of till early 1960s. That was when a twenty-year-old period started, being concerned mainly with the issues of equality and ending discrimination.

Since the second wave of feminism did not accomplish much³⁴, the third wave came in early 1960s to revive the case and took up the challenge to the linguistic level.

The main criticism was aimed at the language (not necessarily English, since this issue applied and still applied for most European languages at the time) being

³⁴ Krollokke et al (2005), pg. 24.

predominantly masculine, and therefore sexist. People tend to use language which assigns men somewhat more important and unequivocally dominant role and which includes a lot of stereotypes, making women seem like second-rate beings or even unworthy to mention (their existence was merely presupposed).

Again, this stems from our history, where each gender was assigned its role from the very dawn of human society: men were celebrated providers – hunting animals, gathering precious resources and building materials, fighting enemies and taking their wealth and land; whereas women worked as ordinary “housewives” – processing everything men brought home, preparing food, making clothes and taking care of babies. These primordial concepts of unequally distributed gender-based roles endured in certain forms throughout most of the human history to the modern era, and most importantly, rooted deep in the minds of all “mankind”. Note that this word is in quotation marks, because even it has been marked to bear politically incorrect connotations now.

The primary premise of political correctness is that nothing can be present in a language unless it is also present in the mind of its speakers. This is why feminists attempt to pluck those roots mercilessly by disregarding women’s derogatory status and fighting men’s view which pursues it. From the linguistic point of view, this fight can be observed both on the morphological and the lexicological levels.

According to feminism, many words of the English lexicon have to be changed or modified in order to comply with the concept of equal status of both genders. Anything that stigmatizes or derogates women and their status should be removed.

As was already stated earlier in this thesis, the concrete proposals of the linguistic transformation are not and cannot be enforced in a legal way and so far have not manage to become exclusive parts of the English language, but there have been strong attempts to make it so and the chance that it happens is very high.

For example, the aforementioned word “*mankind*” could nowadays be perceived as politically incorrect because – in spite of semantically including the whole human species as such –, it appears to be referring to men only, thus making

women seem unworthy of mentioning as if they did not matter. Therefore, there have been attempts to reserve the term “*mankind*” to males only and promote the equally standing word “*womankind*” for females. The holonym term was substituted for “*humankind*” which clearly covers both genders.

The terms “*men*” and “*mankind*” are still used, nevertheless, for describing the whole human race collectively, and even the Oxford English Dictionary continues to do so. Its entry for “*mankind*”³⁵ reads ambiguously: “1. *the human species*; 2. *male people, as distinct from female*”. It is this undesirably perceived ambiguity that is meant to be cleansed during the process of creating a politically correct language.

On the account of “*man*” referring to the entire human species as such, this dictionary also states that this too is historically given: “*in Old English the principal sense of man was ‘a human being’, and the words wer and wif were used to refer specifically to ‘a male person’ and ‘a female person’ respectively. Subsequently, man replaced wer as the normal term for ‘a male person’, but at the same time the older sense ‘a human being’ remained in use*”³⁶.

Other sources point out that the term “*man*” stemmed from Proto-Germanic “*mannaz*” (meaning *man, person*) and state words derived therefrom can designate any or even all human race regardless of their sex or age. They, however, add that this is the “old usage of “*man*” in English”³⁷.

In order to further promote the equality of both genders in the language, English word-stock is constantly scanned for and deprived of any expressions which are formed using a masculine form of a word, whereas it by definition actually includes women as well.

The word “*spokesman*” can provide a good example. Now, it is common that this word denotes men only, while its feminine form “*spokeswoman*” is becoming more common in use. However, the concept of a political correct language deems it fit to hide the information as to what sex the person in question actually is, both

³⁵ <http://www.few.vu.nl/~bvhoude/english/search.php?query=mankind&view=l>

³⁶ http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/man?view=uk

³⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women>

of the above-mentioned words are most frequently replaced with the term “*spokesperson*”, which is gender-wise neutral.

That the English language has been predominantly masculine is showing by the use of pronouns in common texts. That is, people automatically assumed that the person they referred to was a man, even when there was no rational explanation for such inconsiderate presupposition. In many cases, the referred person in question was “the reader (recipient) himself”, to put it politically incorrectly. Understandably, that further infuriated all people aware of women’s unequal position.

A typical example of such an offence could be found in the following common sentence: “*A visitor is asked to remove his shoes*”, which clearly anticipates the recipient to be male without a single logical reason to do so (regardless of the probability of the recipient’s sex to be male).

There are several ways of preventing this sort of sexism, some of them being major, others only marginal in use.

The easiest way is to put the whole utterance in plural: “*Visitors are asked to remove their shoes*”.

Should the author insist on the singular form for whatever reason (particularly to maintain the impression that the text is referring to an individual), the possessive pronoun – which is the only offensive part of that sentence in singular – could be doubled in order to offer forms of both genders: “*A visitor is asked to remove his or her shoes*”.

It is simply customary to put the masculine pronoun first and so far there has been next to no struggle at all about this being politically incorrect. Moreover, such constructed sentence is far better from the phonetic point of view: putting it the other way round (“*her or his*”) would make that sentence considerably more difficult to pronounce because of the “r” phoneme occurring twice right after one another (in “*her*” and “*or*”). This applies for both rhotic and non-rhotic accents of English.

However, writing out both pronouns may prove problematic from certain reasons; others than looking hypercorrectly, that is. The phonetic aspect aside, it might easily become stylistically clumsy to mention both forms in every single case of a possessive pronoun referring to a person of undisclosed gender. It should be noted that this is not just an exclusive matter of possessive pronouns only: it also applies for personal pronouns as well (for example: “*Your lawyer should keep appointments with you. If your lawyer cannot keep an appointment or if your lawyer misses an appointment, he or she should contact you to make another one.*”³⁸).

Of course, the argument of stylistically inappropriate repetition is not valid for texts featuring only one occurrence of a pronoun. However, there might be another considerable disadvantage that comes in mind, and that is the actual *length* of the string (string is originally a computing term coined to denote a universal hyponym of all text values that stand alone as separate units of text data; it is simply a sequence of symbols, ranging from a single character or a number to a word, a chunk of words, a sentence, a paragraph or even more).

As was said, political correctness concerns even the most commonly displayed texts, however short, such as various signs, headlines, and advertisements, usually found in public in great numbers. Our illustrative sentence itself, asking visitors to remove their shoes, comes from such a sign displayed in a doctor’s office.

In case of such texts, careful considering of the space taken by them is commonly a matter of great importance. Authors of these strings often find themselves in a situation when they cannot (or even must not) make the utterance any longer, mainly for graphical reasons. They have to put in all the information they want to be conveyed in the message, while keeping it short in order for the text to fit the space reserved for it. For example, newspaper headlines need to fit one line and texts on signs simply cannot exceed its area. Of course, one could fix this problem by making the size of the text smaller, but that is not always an option either.

First, signs must be legible at all costs. They might carry a warning, a vital piece of information, a restriction of sorts, and they have to be accessible to everyone

³⁸ http://www.lss.bc.ca/assets/pubs/whatYouShouldExpectFromLawyer_eng.pdf

(even those with not particularly good eyesight). And second, few newspaper or magazine editors would want their headlines to be small, because the golden rule of journalist language says that the bigger the headlines are, the more attention they attract.

Apart from pluralizing the whole sentence (which might not always be an option, for example in cases where the text is designed to refer to its recipients as individuals), it is possible to keep the singular form of all clause elements corresponding with the person in question – all but the pronouns, that is. In our case, the sentence would then read “*A visitor is asked to remove their shoes*”.

This option uses a means called the “singular they” and avoids all the above-mentioned problems. It is politically correct, since it does not presuppose the sex of the person, and thus it does not discriminate anyone; it poses no problems as far as the pronunciation is concerned; and the length of the whole string has been extended by mere two letters (only 5 for “*their*” instead of 3 for “*his*”, as opposed to the 10 for “*his or her*” with spaces). In case of longer texts, it is far easier on the style to repeat the mono-syllabic term “*their*” than the excessively long “*his or her*” consisting of three syllables.

However, this last option of “pluralizing” just the pronoun creates a brand new disadvantage: the semantically illogical discrepancy in the grammatical category of number. This way, the noun and the verb are used in singular, whereas the pronoun directly referring to the noun is in plural. That is why this option can be described as “the next best thing after pluralizing the whole sentence”, since the latter is perfectly alright in terms of stylistics, semantics and political correctness.

Anyhow, all of the above-mentioned ways are used in public English: writing out both pronoun forms being the least common option, while the other two surprisingly share about the same level of frequency in formal and official types of texts.

Regarding the changes in pronouns, there is a couple of other ways of being politically correct. These are however rather marginal.

It is possible to modify the “*he or she*” pattern into forms like “*shhe*” or “*s/he*”. Neither of them, however, is easy on the eye, as they are quite unusual from the graphical point of view.

Although the slash symbol is more commonly associated with mathematics, it is sometimes used in public texts for the purpose of separating equal and interchangeable alternatives from each other. Therefore it has what it takes to fulfil the purpose here, and therefore following modification of writing out both pronouns have been recognized: “*s/he*” for the nominative case of personal pronouns, “*him/r*” for other cases, “*his/r*” for possessive pronouns, and “*him/rself*” for reflexive pronouns³⁹.

The main problem in this case, and therefore the main cause of such gender-neutral formations making unusual impression, is the fact that it is far more common to put the otherwise mathematical slash symbol between whole words (as in “*African/American/European origin*”) than in the middle of them, bar abbreviations like “*w/ = with*” and “*w/o = without*”. This is why the slashed versions are only scarcely used, since they require getting used to by readers. Nevertheless, they can be commonly observed in e-mails or Internet chat-rooms, where they are used for the purpose of speeding up typing, thus saving time in a traditionally rather dynamic and fast-paced environment.

In spoken English, on the other way, yet another disadvantage of both these marginal options emerges. Neither of them has an accepted way of pronunciation. Both “*shhe*” and “*s/he*” are pronounced in the very same way as “*she*”, and therefore would not be distinguishable from it. This would cause undesirable confusion, not to mention a certain degree of counter-productivity. For this reason, it is only possible to encounter these two forms of gender-neutral pronouns in written texts; predominantly used by the electronically-operating Internet community, which finds it easy to come up with and eagerly promote unusual neologisms and for which the computer keyboard makes the slash symbol far more accessible to use in uncommon circumstances than it is for a person writing manually with a pen.

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender-neutral_pronoun

When it comes to gender in language, political correctness finds it best to hide the information about what sex the person in question is and to eliminate everything that could imply it. One of the main goals is therefore to create a gender-neutral language – one that does next to no distinction between sexes, because such division is deemed unnecessary, since it is believed to pose a source of out-lived stereotypes, which then lead to sexism, discrimination and offence. Rather than pronouns, in this case it is nouns themselves that are affected by the changes made by political correctness.

A perfect illustration can be observed in names of occupations⁴⁰. As hinted before with the “*mankind*” example, there are certain professions which automatically presume to be held by men, and this is then reflected in their title. Now, in the era of equal opportunities at the labour market, this is no longer considered valid or acceptable.

There are many occupation names now deemed politically incorrect that must be dealt with properly in order to stop being sexist. Several groups of such terms as well as certain patterns in their correction can be observed.

The word “*chairman*” is one of many compound expressions that contain the word “*man*”, which makes them predominantly masculine and therefore sexist. This title has been widely used to describe a presiding officer of a meeting or an administrative head of an institution. It was not until the end of the 20th century that it became common for women to be elected to such position (and when it did, it was widely splashed throughout the media as a sensation in most cases of its occurrence). Since the term “*chairman*” was coined around 1645-1655⁴¹ and was typically used for men until recently, the archetype had a lot of time to root deeply in the society.

Some 300 years later, when the shift in socio-political thinking allowed women to take the “*chairman*” position, and when the awareness of sexism reached a certain point, the problem arose in its full scale.

It was no longer appropriate and acceptable to call a woman a chairman, i.e. to call a female with a masculine noun. Thus, a feminine equivalent was created –

⁴⁰ <http://ag.arizona.edu/agdiv/nonsexist.html>

⁴¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chairman>

“*chairwoman*”. However, in order to keep true to the gender-neutral language, another term “*chairperson*” was coined to describe the occupation in general without any implication as to who holds it. Both “*Chairman*” and “*chairwoman*” can still be used, though, but preferably only in concrete cases: that means in cases where a concrete person is mentioned, whose sex is obviously known. The usage is usually preferred only in cases where such information is actually relevant to the whole message conveyed.

However, when talking about the position in general or when the identity of the person in question is not undisclosed, the new term “*chairperson*” is used instead. It was no sooner than in 1970s that this term was coined⁴². Yet, some institutions (for example the *National Association of Parliamentarians*) are noted for refusing this word and keeping the traditional, albeit controversial “*chairman*” in use despite by whom this position is held⁴³. A metonymical expression “chair” could also be used in order to remain politically correct.

Linguistic conversion (changing the word class of a word with zero morphological transformation) is a major word-formation process, since English uses very little inflection. The main purpose of this process is language economy, because a noun converted to a verb can shorten an utterance significantly.

Having explained this, it should come as no surprise that according to English dictionaries, it is possible to use “*chairman*” as a transitive verb as well. “*To chairman*” obviously means to “*act as or to be a chairman*”. Examples can be found: “*Pharmacists formed a ‘Committee on Revision’ chairmanned by hospital pharmacist Charles Rice, assisted by pharmacist-educator Joseph P. Remington, and by Dr. Squibb, their indefatigable collaborator*”⁴⁴. Such conversion is not possible to do (or has not been recognized yet) with neither “*chairwoman*” nor “*chairperson*” for two key reasons.

First, they are both too long to be converted as a whole: rarely does it happen that a noun consisting of 3 or more syllables is used as a verb; and “*chairman*” is pronounced with only 2 syllables. Second, neither “*woman*” nor “*person*” has

⁴² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chairperson>

⁴³ Zimmerman (1997), pg. 15.

⁴⁴ <http://www.pharmacy.wsu.edu/history/history31.html>

ever served as a root of a verb to carry the morphological suffixes that come with inflection. On the other hand, “*chairman*” was converted easily, since the verb “*to man*” was used already in the Middle Ages. Oxford dictionary gives its meaning as “*to provide (a place or machine) with the personnel to run, operate, or defend it*”⁴⁵. You can therefore man a ship, castle ramparts, or – to bring this point to modern times – a desk in your office or a cash register in a store.

The simplistic term “*chair*” can again solve this problem, since it bears no disadvantages whatsoever when it comes to conversion or inflection. A newspaper headline can therefore read “*Obama to chair a historic U.N. council nuclear meeting*”⁴⁶.

There are other job names which resemble the “*chairman*” example and they are dealt with accordingly. Basically, the **-man** part of the compound is usually replaced with gender-neutral **-person**, or the expression is changed as a whole. While it is possible to create a feminine version of any such term easily, political correctness deems it fit to hide the gender of the person in question entirely. It is because of the effort to treat both sexes equally that this information is considered redundant and not worth mentioning. Not disclosing the gender also erases any opportunity for sexism, thus serving as a means of prevention.

A brief list of commonly corrected names of professions follows.

A *businessman* became a business person, an executive, a merchant, an industrialist, an entrepreneur, a manager, etc. *Businessmen* can be simply paraphrased as *people in business*.

A *cameraman* mutated into a camera operator or a photographer.

The afore-mentioned *chairman* could be – apart from the above-suggested alterations – replaced by a moderator, group leader, department head, or presiding officer.

Congressmen could be referred to as members of Congress, Representatives. Writing out both versions is also possible, since a Congress by its definition implies a certain number of people and the chances that it includes women are very high. Therefore, since it is commonly referred to as an institution as such, its

⁴⁵ http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/man?view=uk

⁴⁶ <http://news.uk.msn.com/world/article.aspx?cp-documentid=149879139>

members could be called “*congressmen and congresswomen*” – if style and space allow – as in “*Newly Elected Congressmen and Congresswomen Arrive to Learn the Ropes*”⁴⁷ “.

A *fireman* should be called a fire fighter or a member of a fire brigade. A *foreman* becomes a supervisor. A *policeman* is usually replaced with a police officer or a detective. A *salesman* was suggested to be replaced with a salesperson, sales agent, sales associate, sales representative, sales force, etc. The plural of “*salesperson*” can be “*salespersons*” or “*salespeople*”. The already mentioned *spokesman* can also be referred to as a representative, an advocate or a proponent. A *statesman* is now a political reader, a public servant, a diplomat, etc.

A *sportsman* could be paraphrased as a *sportsperson* (note that this term includes both professional and amateur people), an athlete, a sports enthusiast or outdoor enthusiast. However, it is better to refer to each sportsperson according to the particular brand of sport they participate in – *a canoer, a fisher, a footballer, a hockey player or a hockeyist, etc.*

Sexism is frequently perceived not only in expressions that contain the –**man** part⁴⁸. It also affects other compounds which were coined using a typically masculine word. In these cases, it is very uncommon to observe feminine forms, though they are not always out of the question.

For example, a *delivery boy* is one of the many expressions that are aimed to be changed. Political correctness dictates that this word be replaced with one of the following: *a delivery driver, a delivery clerk, a porter, a deliverer, or most commonly a courier or a messenger*. A *delivery girl* is also used in concrete situations, despite not being gender-neutral.

A *headmaster*, where the masculine noun “*master*” (as opposed to “*mistress*”) poses the problem, becomes a principal. A *kingpin* (with the exclusively masculine head “*king*”) is now a key person or a leader. Although one can hardly imagine the word “*kingdom*” to be changed just because the ruling monarchs of any such territory have been queens exclusively for a significant period of time.

⁴⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/13/AR2006111301165.html>

⁴⁸ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/3446652/Guide-to-nonsexist-language-Pronouns-Each-Person-To-the-Best>

On the other hand, there are professions or positions which were traditionally held by women, and in some cases, this was reflected in their names. A *housewife* can be cited as one of the most frequent examples, corresponding with the prehistoric outline of gender roles that endured well into modern times. Women were charged with the important, yet underrated task of maintaining home, keeping it clean, preparing food, taking care of babies, etc.

None of that was perceived as equal to what men did in any patriarchal or predominantly masculine society. Therefore, all expressions that somehow originated from this role outline now carry a negative connotation that stems from such stereotypes. These connotations imply secondary significance, subsidiary importance and even a certain degree of derogation; all of this can be connected with such terms because of the marginalisation of women as housewives.

Feminism generally suggests that housework should be an appropriate role for a partner of either sex. The sociological paradigm also shifted and it is not impossible to see males choosing house chores to do for a living or to staying at home while the other partner takes care of the household income.

It is therefore politically incorrect to describe such position as a “*housewife*” – firstly, it bears negative connotation, and secondly, it can now be held by men as well, although it is still perceived by many societies as the natural role for women. Terms like *housekeeper* or *homemaker* are now preferred, although a *househusband* has also been recognized (as in the Guardian’s story by Jon Absalom, a British worker in a converted warehouse, who gave up his carrier in order to stay home and look after his baby son and who wrote an expose about the position and perception of his like called “*The Truth about Life as a Househusband*”⁴⁹).

By the same token, a “*maid*” (meaning a female employed in domestic service, formerly a maidservant) or a “*cleaning lady*” should now be referred to as a *houseworker*, a *housekeeper*, or a *custodian*.

Although the latest step in politically correct treatment of both sexes – when it comes to names of occupations – is aimed at creating a gender-neutral language using expressions which do not give away the sex of the person in question, the

⁴⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2005/oct/27/childrensservices.familyandrelationships>

situation was different from the linguistic point of view at the beginning of the sociological shift that commonly allowed women to take positions typically perceived as masculine and vice versa.

Since the language – and the society as well – was not prepared for such a situation, a need was felt to highlight the fact that a member of certain sex holds a position usually associated with the other sex. Where possible, feminine forms were created on the morphological basis: a female author was an “*authoress*”, a female poet was a “*poetess*”, and a female sculptor was a “*sculptress*”. These are, as will be explained below, almost obsolete.

Where it was not possible to create feminine forms by replacing the masculine suffix *-er* and its allomorphs with their feminine counterparts, free compounds were coined. There was a “*female doctor*”, rather than a “*doctress*”. On the other hand, male nurses were frequent, as men decided to act as qualified medical staff other than doctors.

Many proponents of gender-neutral language deprecate such terms, however, arguing that such statements of obvious exceptions indicate an ersatz member of that profession. That is, the current aim of political correctness tries to hide a person’s gender, rather than to highlight it, even in cases of such gender “crossover”. This is because highlighting it would mean that the fact of a male taking a female role and vice versa still presents a surprise, which would compromise the idea of equality being a matter-of-course.

Therefore, an authoress is an author again, a female doctor returned back to being a doctor, and a male nurse was simply restored to just being a nurse. Even though feminine versions of such words exist, they are not commonly used. Expressions such as *doctor*, *nurse*, *author* or *poet* are considered gender-neutral again.

The *-er* ending is actually double-edged. In some words it is considered masculine and has a feminine counterpart, but in other cases it is considered gender-neutral and lacks feminine equivalents altogether. Confront (male) *waiter* vs. (female) *waitress* on one hand, and (male) *teacher* vs. (female) *teacher* on the other. In the latter case of a single expression, no changes occur, since it is already gender-neutral: teacher still covers both a male teacher and a female teacher.

In cases of gender-specific terms, the tendency is to come up with a single alternative with neither **-er** nor **-ress** (including their allomorphs), or to merge both genders in a single expression ending **-er** and consider it neutral. Therefore, instead of a male waiter and a female waitress, the term “*waitperson*” (neutral by definition) or simply a “*waiter*” (neutral by declaration) could be used. The current status quo in this particular case, however, is to use gender-specific titles, while neologisms such as “*waitron*” or neutral expressions like “*server*” or rather unusual compound “*waitstaff*” are rarely used.

An interesting exception could be observed in the acting profession. The word *actress* can pride itself upon a long history of usage (unlike other feminine job titles), since it was created as soon as in the 16th century⁵⁰. Though theatre has been a recognized form of entertainment since as early as Ancient Greece, for a long period of time women were not allowed to perform on stage. In Ancient Greece, theatre was written and performed by men – including female characters; furthermore – though the evidence is not conclusive – it is likely that it was performed solely by men *and for* men as well⁵¹. Even later in the Middle Ages, it was considered disgraceful for a woman to go on stage (the acting profession was actually never perceived as a source of fame or honesty in the medieval world), and this belief continued as long as until the 17th century, where it was broken in Venice.

Since then, actresses were one of the first “profession” titles to have their feminine alternative derived from an otherwise masculine-suffixed word. Because of its long tradition, it managed to resist the efforts of gender-neutralizing for a long time. However, even this term got under the scope of political correctness and tendencies to neutralize it can be observed in the United States. According to the essay by Sheri Linden entitled “*From Actor to Actress and Back Again*”⁵² published in *Los Angeles Times*, most American actresses now call themselves *female actors* (which is not gender-neutral) or just *actors* (which is), although the term *actress* is still common in general use.

⁵⁰ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/actress>

⁵¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2002_52_fri_04.shtml

⁵² <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/18/entertainment/ca-actress18>

For example, the *Screen Actors Guild*, a major American labour union of performers, annually gives out awards for “Best Male Actor” and “Best Female Actor”⁵³. On the other hand, the *Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences* still uses the four traditional acting categories to give its Oscars to: Best Actor and Best Actress in a Leading or Supporting Role, respectively⁵⁴.

Note that many terms closely related with the acting profession have actually never had to put up with creating feminine forms and gender-neutralizing them later on: singer, player, performer, etc.

The gender-neutral *fisher* has been used for the masculine term *fisherman*; however, in Canada, Australia, Britain, Ireland and elsewhere many women who catch fish have inveighed harshly against this, demanding to be called *fishermen*, which they argued was the correct gender-neutral term to describe their career choice. Similarly, many female horseriders have expressed a preference to be described as *horsemen*⁵⁵.

Interestingly, a midwife can be of either gender, since etymologically it comes from the Old English “*mit wif*”, meaning “*with wife*”. Although this term ends with what could be perceived as a gender-specific word, the **-wife** ending here does not present the head of the noun, and therefore only denotes a person giving a prenatal care to expecting mothers without disclosing their own gender.

Sexism is of course not perceived only in job titles. There are many other expressions in everyday English that bear a certain degree of chauvinism, albeit arguably unintentional⁵⁶. However, it is the stereotypes again that meddled in the thinking of people when coining and using them, which helped to set up the perceived source of unequal position of both genders.

For example, the Pilgrim Fathers are central figures of the history of the United States and present a key theme in its culture. The name is commonly applied to

⁵³ www.sag.org

⁵⁴ www.oscars.org

⁵⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender-specific_job_title

⁵⁶ [http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/events/winterconference/2003/Presentations/12-15-03\(Monday\)/Session2/Course_Content-Fine.pdf](http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/events/winterconference/2003/Presentations/12-15-03(Monday)/Session2/Course_Content-Fine.pdf)

the early settlers of the Plymouth Colony, the second successful settlement in what was later to become the United States of America. Since the term is formed by using a masculine word, it seemingly implies that it denotes males only without any reference to women who were of course a part of the congregation that fled the volatile political environment in the East Midlands as well. Since the Pilgrim Fathers are among the most celebrated American figures, the feminists were quick to mark this term as sexist and politically incorrect. It is now common to refer to them as simply *the Pilgrims*, although *the Pilgrim Fathers* are still widely used.

The Founding Fathers is a common expression in non-American English that refers to people who are credited with establishing their nation or who have been recognized as making a major contribution to the development. Though it is true that most of the politically and diplomatically active people in the Euro-American history were men, feminism considers it politically incorrect to ignore the versatile support provided by women, however inexplicit (or ignored by historians) it might have been. Therefore, the correct terms to be used now are “*founders, national founders, pioneers, colonists, forebears*” and so on depending on the particular circumstances of each nation’s creation.

The term “*forefathers*”, although still widely used, bears a certain level of ignoring women as well, which also stems from our traditionally patriarchal history. The same could be applied to the words “*patron*” or “*patronage*”, which were etymologically derived from the Latin *pater* (meaning “*father*”)⁵⁷ and thus are gender-specific, although they are commonly used in relation with persons of either gender. For example, an online website *Global Oneness* provides a list of countries and places under the patronage of Saint Mary⁵⁸. This matter has gone as far as creating a feminine equivalent to “*patron*”, which is a “*patroness*” and is defined by the *Marriam-Webster Online Dictionary* as “*a woman who is a patron*”⁵⁹. Despite being coined using the feminine suffix *-ess*, this word is still derived from a clearly masculine term. The right female equivalent to the Latin “*patron*” is a “*matron*”. However, according to the respective entry in the same

⁵⁷ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=patron>

⁵⁸ http://www.experiencefestival.com/patron_saint_-_countries_and_places_under_marys_patronage

⁵⁹ <http://cheetah.eb.com/dictionary/patroness>

dictionary⁶⁰, its denotations indicate that this expression took a slightly different way through the course of the historical development of English: “1) *a married woman usually marked by dignified maturity or social distinction*; 2) *a woman who supervises women or children (as in a school or a police station)*; 3) *the chief officer in a women’s organization*”.

Even from the word “*fatherland*” meaning “the place of one’s origin”, it is obvious just how strong the symbolical link between one’s parents and one’s geographical background is. This term is of course considered politically incorrect now, and although its feminine synonymous counterpart “*motherland*” was coined as well, the current effort made by gender-neutralizing is to use neither. Terms like “*homeland*” or “*native land*” are now preferred instead.

Since most of the societies and civilizations around the world were patriarchal throughout the entire history of sapient mankind, the already mentioned predominantly masculine gender-role outline was traditionalized and encouraged through the entire period since forming societies in the prehistoric era to modern times. The development of people’s thinking of course followed this pattern, which was reflected in the meaning of many words created in the process.

The outline that depicted males as primary providers dictated a certain number of positive characteristics – physical and psychological – desired in young males in order for them to be able to uphold their role in their society. These were mainly bravery, body strength, endurance, courage, adventurous spirit, high threshold of pain, and limited display of emotions to name but a few. Women, on the other hand, were typically perceived to be lacking them; moreover, women having some of these characteristics were considered an “anomaly” (rather than a benefit), even to the extent of undesirable deviation from their traditional role.

However, if a male individual did not have these characteristics, he would not be recognized as a fully-fledged adult man and he would be treated accordingly: derogation and even punishments would usually ensue, and assigning his position between women and thus marking him as inferior was a matter-of-course at times.

⁶⁰ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/matron>

All of this was reflected in human language and it is for this outline of roles that it should come as no surprise that many expressions, now held sexist and politically incorrect, were created in history. There are words even in today's language that recall this outline, denoting a variety of covetable characteristics usually assigned to men that were used to describe women as well. Until now, that is.

A typical example can be found in the word "*manly*". To be manly meant to be courageous, strong, vigorous, adventurous, spirited, direct, competitive, physical, mechanical, logical, active, and self-confident and to possess many other similar traits. The word *manly* was even actually used as a synonym for any of them at certain points. Current sociological shift, however, has shown that women now commonly possess these characteristics as well (which is no longer looked down upon as something negative), whereas not all men do (neither this should be perceived as a lack now). Therefore, "*manly*" is sought to drop the status of an acceptable equivalent for these characteristics and the politically correct way to describe a person is to use the very word denoting the feat in question.

There are also negative connotations to the word "*manly*" such as violent, rude, messy, etc. The same actually goes for "*womanly*", which is enticed with connotations as weak, (too) emotional, (too) gentle, engaging in activities of behaviour which were traditionally connected to women, etc. They are to be dropped as well, very much in the same way.

Summary:

Changing the expressions whose perceived offensiveness stemmed from the morphological reflection of gender present one of the biggest successes of political correctness. Gender-neutral nouns as well as personal or possessive pronouns are widely used when referring to persons whose gender is undisclosed or unrelated to the message conveyed: the sex of the person in question is no longer presupposed. The trend is to hide this information altogether unless it is necessary to be mentioned.

Many innovative ways of dealing with the duality of the English personal and possessive pronouns, the majority of which have not managed to be accepted by the general public. However, the "singular they", despite its intrinsic grammatical

discrepancy, has been successfully adopted into everyday use, appearing in today's public language almost exclusively – neutral nouns like “*someone*”, “*anyone*” or “*everyone*” are not used only with masculine personal or possessive pronouns in public speech codes any more.

The predominantly masculine lexicon, too, is being replaced with gender-neutral expressions which either reflect the respective gender of the people in question (where necessary and appropriate) or neutrally comprise members of both genders, alternatively. The replacement of several gender-specific terms, however, occurs in a rather surprising way; certain expressions, despite being traditionally considered masculine, remained in use – or were even returned to use after having been abandoned previously – to denote female individuals as well.

Today's urge not to mention a person's gender somewhat resembles the indifferent attitude of the previous decades – to that extent that the gender was usually undisclosed, even though masculine nouns or pronouns were used, regardless of the actual sex of the individual (i.e., the actual gender was presupposed or ignored). Today's trend, too, dictates that this information be undisclosed unless relevant or necessary, although in a different way and for different reasons.

When it comes to sexism, political correctness achieved the most in this regard, and – with only a few pending lexical exceptions – the current English became a truly gender-neutral language.

Specific terms which put members of one gender in a somewhat superior position or derogate the other are discontinued and replaced with non-specific lexicon. Not only is it nowadays considered inappropriate to refer to members of one sex with terms which are derived from it to highlight traditionally gender-related traits, it is also politically incorrect to refer to members of one sex with terms which are derived from the other gender in order to bring attention of an individual lacking these traits. Therefore, one can neither describe a man to be “*manly*” if he possesses traditionally desired characteristics, nor can one call him “*effeminate*” for not possessing them.

III.3 The Problem of Racism, Ethnicity and Nationality

Racism and the equal standing of all ethnical groups is the second most important problem of the current egalitarian tendencies, and therefore the second most significant issue when it comes to creating a politically correct language.

The United States of America was given a fitting nickname “*the melting pot*” for a good reason. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this expression as “*a place where a variety of races, cultures or individuals assimilate into a cohesive whole*”⁶¹. As it should come as no surprise, even this fact is given historically. The first settlers to arrive to the continent of America and to interact with the native population of the 15th century time were Europeans. Predominantly they left their homelands for political reasons and came from influential countries such as the Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, etc., known for their expansive colonization of the rest of the world and for great seafaring explorations of the then uncharted territories.

In the 17th century, large numbers of immigrants kept arriving to what was to become the United States as indentured servants, who were replaced by even greater numbers of African slaves by the turn of the century. Because of the excessive and unanimously legalized slavery, many people – mainly of African origin – were forcefully brought to America in order to take inferior positions. The USA remains a melting pot to this very day, since being the most influential country with the most advanced economy in the world, it offers many life opportunities to countless people from all around the globe.

After the abolishment of slavery in the 19th century and the rise of the egalitarian movements, the equal standing of all races got into the centre of political attention. For a handlist of the dates at which major historical colonist superpowers and other countries around the globe abolished slavery, please refer to *Appendix #2* of this thesis. Although the way was a long and a hard one, the equality of people of all races has been achieved: it is now ensured by law and any form of discrimination based on the grounds of different ethnicity is strictly

⁶¹ <http://www.aolsvc.merriam-webster.aol.com/dictionary/melting%20pot>

illegal. Except for the discrimination in language, that is. Therefore, racism also found its way under the scope of the socio-linguistic concept of political correctness.

The proposed changes to modern language are purely lexical and are centred on a limited amount of expressions only, the most prominent of which being those that refer to what is the most obvious and the easiest to differentiate when it comes to ethnicity – the colour of one's skin.

The origin of labelling and the reason why it was so “successful” are given psychologically. One of the key processes of human psyche (despite being that of a self-proclaimed *homo sapiens sapiens* species) is simplification: i.e. dividing all the large random and non-cohesive information input into smaller parts that are easier to comprehend and operate with, thus providing convenient building blocks for coining future ideas and notions. Therefore, it is very simple (and simplistic, too) to use terms denoting a part in a way that refers to the whole thing, perhaps in a sentence whose message has nothing in common with the nature or the essence of the mentioned part. The described figure of speech is called a synecdoche⁶² and the argument above explains why it is so easy to use.

Another significant way of human thinking is generalization, i.e. considering characteristics relating to an individual member of a social group and assigning them to the whole group en masse. This process allowed the spread of the said synecdochical terms.

Therefore, when it comes to racism, perhaps the most profane politically incorrect expression is the word “*black*”. Although being merely a name of a colour originally, few other words gained so many negative connotations based on offensive and harmful stereotypes. History offers ample evidence of the “coloured” community being treated poorly only because the dominant “white” community perceived the former as genetically and socially inferior. To delve into the details of the oppressed ethnic groups’ strife for equal standing would be redundantly space-consuming for the purposes of this thesis, as it is not the central idea of it – unlike the reflection of its outcome.

⁶² Lanham (1991), pg. 189.

Suffice to say that in the course of recent events, ethnicity officially ceased to be a matter of discrimination and the movements for political correctness deem it necessary for this fact to be mirrored in the current language.

Therefore it is no longer politically correct to refer to people according to the colour of their skin and all such expressions were replaced by new ones, specifically coined for this purpose. As was the case of fighting sexism, these new words were created in a way that would hide the information about the actual ethnicity of the person in question, since this fact is completely irrelevant in most occurrences of it being mentioned. Again, hiding this fact helps to *prevent* causing any discrimination or offence which might be inspired by it.

Searching for the appropriate term lasted several decades of the 20th century. Until the second quarter of the century, the terms *mullatos* and *coloured* were used, the latter obviously suggesting an abnormal condition, something which deviated from the perceived standard. These were later considered outmoded and were replaced by the expression *negro* (derived from Latin “*niger*”, meaning “*black*” – the actual word “*black*” was regarded negative at that time when used to refer to a person⁶³). In the 1940s, the word was capitalized so that it was spelled *Negro* from then on. It was generally accepted as a normal, formal, and completely neutral both by those of such ethnic descent and by those of other descents.

By the mid 1960s, this term acquired ample negative connotations and so during the American Civil Right Movement several black leaders objected to its usage, suggesting the term *Black* to be used in its stead⁶⁴. From then on, the term *Negro* came to be considered an ethnic slur, and recently its status changed to being archaic.

The preferred term to use nowadays is “*African American*” (sometimes also spelled “*Afro-American*”). It is used to describe the citizens or the residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black population of Africa or who have at least partial Sub-Saharan African ancestry⁶⁵. Terms like “*Black Africans*”,

⁶³ Nguyen (2004).

⁶⁴ Smith (1992), pg. 496-514.

⁶⁵ McKinnon, Jesse. “The Black Population: 2000 United States Census Bureau” (PDF). United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-5.pdf>. Retrieved 2007-10-22.

“*Black Americans*” or simply “*black*” are still in common use as neutral expressions in the Euro-American world, except for the United States where there are tendencies to avoid mentioning the actual colour of the skin altogether.

Although *Negro* no longer serves as the universal name for this ethnic group, it still survived to this very day in a slightly changed form “*nigger*”, or its widely used slang alternative “*nigga*”. Both are generally considered politically incorrect and highly inappropriate.

The “black” culture is highly specific for its music, various sociolects and its distinguishable dressing code and it still remains very popular, mainly among the American youth (not exclusively African American youth). In fact, it has so inspiring influence on teenagers and youngsters of the Western world that it inspired a somewhat widespread merged subculture, commonly described as “*whigga*” (alternatively spelled “*wigger*, *wigga* or *whigger*”, all just variations of the self-explanatory blend of “*white*” and “*nigga*”). This term is rather pejorative and denotes “*a white person who allophilically emulates mannerisms, slang and fashions stereotypically associated with urban African Americans (...) especially in relation to hip hop culture*”⁶⁶.

Same level of political incorrectness applies to the “white” demographic. The preferred American term for this ethnicity is “*Caucasian*”, named after the geopolitical region of Caucasus at the borders of Asia and Europe, comprising parts of Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The very name Caucasus comes from the eponymous Biblical character, a great-grandson of Noah and the ancestor of North Caucasians.

The concept of the Caucasian race was developed around 1800 by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a German anthropologist, who considered the people of the Caucasian region to be the archetype of the white genome⁶⁷ – a classification based solely on the grounds of craniology⁶⁸ (a branch of physical anthropology studying bones of the human skull, which serve as one of the most revealing features of human body in terms of the anthropomorphological development of

⁶⁶ Bernstein (1998).

⁶⁷ <http://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/knarf/People/blumen.html>

⁶⁸ Blumenbach (1865), pg. 126.

our species). The term Caucasian race comprises some or all of the indigenous population of Europe, North Africa, the so-called Horn of Africa (the Somali Peninsula), West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. Despite having sparked significant controversy (as there is no simple genetic and definition equivalent to “*Caucasian*”⁶⁹, and thus this concept is purely sociological, rather than biological), it still serves as the American equivalent to the term “*white*”, which is still tolerable and generally considered neutral in Europe.

Of course, there are other ethnicities around the world, since the skin colours are not limited to just black and white. The United States being a melting pot, it is no wonder that people from all of them can be found there. That naturally means that their names have also got under the scope of political correctness.

The indigenous population of both North and South America consisted of smaller or larger tribal communities and sub-communities of the Apaches, Aztecs, Cherokees, Comanches, Hopis, Incas, Iroquois, Mayans, Mohicans, Mohawks, Navajos, Seminoles, and Siouxs (to name but the best known of them), scattered throughout the central parts of the continent and commonly referred to by the umbrella term “*the Indians*”. Their skin colour being of somewhat darkish-brownish hue, the expansive European collonists were quick to label them accordingly, using synecdochical terms such as “*the redskins*” or “*the red men*”. When it comes to naming, the tribes responded in kind, calling the colloninsts “*the palefaces*”. All of these expressions were largely popularized in the novels by the German author Karl May and his worldfamous saga about the fictional charismatic and peacemaking Apache leader Winnetou (the first May’s book with this hero was published in 1893).

These terms, based on the colour of the corresponding peoples’ skin, are now naturally considered politically incorrect and racist. However, so is the term “*Indians*”. This word was actually created by accident. It is general knowledge that the continent of America was discovered in 1492 by the famous Spanish seafarer and an admiral to the Crown of Castile (today’s Spain), Christopher Columbus; although there are notions that an Icelandic explorer Leif Erikson (also spelled Ericsson or Eiriksson) was actually the first European to land on the

⁶⁹ <http://raceandgenomics.ssrc.org/Lewontin/>

shores of North America some 500 hundred years ago, though the evidence – mainly coming from ambiguous Viking sagas – is not conclusive (and yet, in 1963 American archaeologists found ruins of a Viking-type settlement in Northern Newfoundland to support the story of Vinland, the land Erikson is rumored to have founded in America⁷⁰).

Nevertheless, because of vast evidence granted by detailed documentation of his travels, Columbus is generally credited with the discovery of the Americas in 1492 (although he did not actually reach the South American mainland until his third voyage in 1498⁷¹). The trouble is that Columbus's expeditions were never meant to discover new territories. Knowing that the Earth was round (a fact that was strongly supported by astronomy and seafare navigation, albeit still being disclaimed, frowned upon and vigorously persecuted by the Christian Church of the time), Columbus was asked and generously funded by the joint Castilian and Aragon rulers to discover a new trading sea-route to Asia, hoping to bypass the Portugal's lock on Africa and the Indian Ocean and to reach India by travelling straight west⁷².

In that direction, Columbus naturally came across America, which he was convinced was Asia. Specifically, he visited the Bahamas (which he thought was Japan), Cuba (which he believed was China), and later the mainland of the Central/South America which he assumed – according to his maps – to be India. That is why his crew – in good faith – were calling the local inhabitants they met the Indians, a label that persisted for many centuries until this very day and was not disfavoured even after Columbus's mistake was revealed (in 1507, one year after Columbus's death, when the first world map was published by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller on which he named the new continent America after the Latinized first name of the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci). After that, the infamous land- and wealth-mongery of the aggressive European colonists was quick to assure that countless wars against the indigenous people of the Americas broke out, resulting in their poor treatment and near extermination in the future and the discrimination of the survivors in the modern days.

⁷⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/erikson_leif.shtml

⁷¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_of_America

⁷² De Lamar (1992), pg. 341.

Thanks to the modern trend of soul searching of the United States, its population – in a possible attempt to recognize the inconsiderate behaviour of their ancestors and perhaps to absolve the guilty conscience – wants to acknowledge the fact that America is not the homeland of the past colonists, but of the indigenous tribes. And thus, a new, politically correct term was coined in homage to the original people of the so-called New World: “*the Native Americans*”.

However, even this expression had to face certain amount of resentment, mainly stemming from the fact that any person born in a country is by definition *native* to that country, and the term *native American* could be applied to the vast majority of today’s population of the USA, regardless of their ethnicity. To avoid this confusion, the expression meant to denote the indigenous people is spelled capitalized.

Nonetheless, the word Indian still persists in use for the sake of traditions and is reflected in the names of various organizations, commonly found in collocation with the word “*American*” as in the *National Congress of American Indians*⁷³, *American Indian Research and Policy Institute*⁷⁴, *National Museum of the American Indian*⁷⁵, etc. The expression “*American Indian*” is meant to help clarifying the distinction between the indigenous Americans and the people of India, for whom the demonym “*Indian*” also applies. Furthermore, at the 1977 United Nations *Conference on Indians of the Americas*, representatives of many tribes collectively agreed on calling themselves the American Indians, rather than Native Americans⁷⁶. This was also rather uncompromisingly argued for by Russel Means, a vocal American Indian activist, in his paper entitled “*I am an American Indian, Not a Native American!*”, where he objected to the latter term on the grounds of it being an exonym (a name for a place or a personal name that is not used within that place or for that person by the local inhabitants⁷⁷), and claimed that the word “*Indian*” did not originate from neither a historical nor geographical mistake, but rather it is a proud expression coming from “*an English*

⁷³ <http://www.ncai.org/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.airpi.org/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

⁷⁶ <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/dunbarortiz060206.html>

⁷⁷ www.geocities.com/agihard/ILA-exonym-talk-text.doc

*bastardization of two Spanish words 'En Dio', which correctly translated means 'in with God'*⁷⁸ [sic].

Other alternative expressions have been coined, including compounds such as “*Aboriginal Americans, Original Americans, First Americans, and even blends like Amerindians or Amerinds*” (although these are actually blends in French only, they were later borrowed into English). All of these, however, are just marginal in common use – yet it is noteworthy that the term “*Amerindian*” is officially used by *The World Almanach*⁷⁹ (a best-selling American yearly reference book conveying popular information about subjects such as world changes, sensations, tragedies, sports events, etc).

Other significant ethnic groups found in the United States (and distinguishable by their skin colours) are of East-Asian descent and Latin American descent.

The Asians have been traditionally referred to as the “*Mongoloid race*”, which is now potentially offensive, as is the case of the synecdochical term “*yellow race*”⁸⁰. Despite the obvious “colourism” of the latter, the former expression gained additional and especially negative connotations in modern language: the word “*Mongoloid*” has been used as a synonym for persons with Down Syndrome and in English, it is a generic insult meaning “idiot”⁸¹. In an attempt to avoid all of the disadvantages of this terminology, the simple umbrella term “Asians” is commonly used.

Naturally, avoiding to mention the skin colour when referring to the people from Latin America is politically correct. The accepted expressions include “*Latino*” or “*Hispanic*”, denoting people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin⁸². These ethnonyms, however, are used regardless of race, rather than origin, and are a matter of self-identification in the US.

Other common politically incorrect expressions featuring synecdochical reductionism include “*banana republic*”, “*camel country*” and their like, which

⁷⁸ <http://www.peaknet.net/~aardvark/means.html>

⁷⁹ <http://www.worldalmanac.com/>

⁸⁰ *The American Heritage guide to contemporary usage and style* (2005), pg. 512.

⁸¹ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=945>

⁸² <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-1.pdf>

are downright pejorative terms used for denoting usually poor countries dependent on limited agriculture, featuring a significant and typical element that was usually the only one to pass into the common knowledge (or perhaps the common ignorance) of the self-proclaimed First World. Political correctness demands these derogatory expressions be dropped altogether with no alternatives suggested.

In certain interpretations, it is possible to find archetypes based on colours in one concrete example which surprisingly serves as a symbol of an event which was meant to overcome all differences and unite people from all around the globe – the Olympic flag. Designed in 1913 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French historian and the founder of the modern Olympic games, it consists of five interlocked rings, each of different colour, symbolizing the five continents of the world which are “open to healthy competition”. These are Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania (the North America and the South America are depicted as a single continent and Antarctica was omitted because it basically homes next to no population whatsoever to speak of in terms of Olympic Games). The corresponding colours are blue, yellow, black, green, and red, strictly in this exact order coming from left to right.

Some interpret the rings in the way – although not conclusively – that each of them represents a specific continent, which is based on a particular colour being related to a certain geographical or demographical feature of that continent⁸³. The geographical relations can be as follows: the blue ring symbolizes Oceania because of the seas (this part of the world features the greatest ocean-to-land ratio), and the green represents Europe for its vast vegetation that covers most of its territory (unlike the rest of the continents). The connotations behind the other three rings are purely demographical and rather self-explanatory: their colours are believed to simply represent the colour of the skin of the majority of each local population: black for Africa, yellow for Asia, and red for the Americas.

Nevertheless, changing the Olympic flag is not one of the goals of political correctness, because as is explicitly stated in the *Olympic Charter* written by the

⁸³ <http://www.wisteme.com/question.view?targetAction=viewQuestionTab&id=322>

International Olympic Committee: “*no continent is represented by any specific ring*⁸⁴”.

It should be noted, that the demonym for the residents of the United States is “*American*”, which could be potentially considered politically incorrect itself, since it is actually the very same when referring to someone who is from the USA and someone who comes from the American continent as such. Thus, it is on the same level as for example “*a British*” and “*a European*”, and it simply assumes that “*an American*” would come from the United States (even though this might be more likely, political correctness does not take probability into consideration, as it is usually based on stereotypes and presuppositions). However, no significant complaints have been heard so far on that account by representatives or activists from any other American country.

The same level of potential, yet so far unseen political incorrectness could actually be perceived by some in the collocation “*Western world*” and its derivatives which are occasionally used throughout this thesis. Note how “*western*”, a purely conventional course of geographical direction, is today commonly used in the sense of “*developed*”, a means of evaluation of a country or a region. Similar meaning has been to a certain extent attached to “*southern*”, since the northern hemisphere of the Earth comprises practically all the world’s most advanced countries, as opposed to the south which has traditionally been predominantly agricultural (rather than industrial), and thus perceived as poorer, which is an observation based on experience.

Surprisingly, the North-South and the West-East division of the world should not be put on the same level of significance: north and south are objective directions (because of the Earth’s poles) and their fixed border, the equator, was given mathematically, whereas west and east are subjective directions (because the Earth is not a perfect round globe, but rather a conical ovoid, fittingly called a *geoid*) and their arbitrary border, the prime meridian, has been established conventionally to pass through Greenwich, England, in 1851.

⁸⁴ http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_122.pdf

Concordantly, terms like *First World*, *Second World* and *Third World* are continuously used means of obvious evaluation of the economical and social advances of the world's regions, although they were actually coined during World War II for the sole purpose of denoting – in respective order – the United States and its allies (also known as the “*Western Bloc*”), the Soviet Union and its allies (also known as the “*Eastern Bloc*”), and the rest of the world's countries, either neutral or non-aligned. The current meaning of the division, is somewhat identical to the one known as the undisputed *Human Development Index*, evaluating countries of the world by the statistical levels of gross domestic product, life expectancy, quality of education and literacy, and the overall standard of living. The countries with the highest *Human Development Index* more or less correspond to those which are traditionally described as those of the First World. Interestingly, the higher the HDI, the higher the actual level of the political correctness awareness in that country. For an up-to-date map depicting current HDI evaluation of all countries, please refer to *Appendix #3* of this thesis.

All of this, however, is still considered neutral on the very day of writing this thesis, mainly because political correctness is nowadays still exclusive to the Euro-American part of the world, the very same part which is described by the expression in question.

Summary:

Since expressions which are somehow related to one's ethnicity or origins are usually closely connected to the traditional and historically given discrimination, such information is meant to be avoided unless it is necessary for the message conveyed, as is the case of gender. Interestingly, however, adjectives derived from skin colours are considered rather politically incorrect in public language, and yet they remained in use in private language to a certain extent, especially in case of the members of ethnic minorities who regard the newly coined expressions as exonyms.

Various other expressions and their connotations which could be potentially perceived as offensive are present in the current English language. However, only few of them have been marked for replacement by politically correct terms.

III.4 The Problem of Disabilities

The overall awareness of the problems caused by mental and physical disabilities has been rising significantly in recent years. The no-barrier policies have set off large-scale reshaping of the environment and reconstructing buildings in order to make the movement, navigation and the overall life in the society much easier for the disabled. There are many laws supporting the position of people with various disabilities on the labour market and forbidding their overall discrimination as such. The *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* defines disability as “*a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities*”⁸⁵.

Political correctness also discovered certain expressions describing the disabled, which are commonly used regardless of their perceived insensitivity.

One of the most offensive and insensitive sounding word is the term “*invalid*”, usually denoting a person using a wheelchair. The negativity of this expression, albeit quite obvious, has been recognized only recently. The Oxford English Dictionary gives two possible meanings of the word⁸⁶: 1) *a person made weak or disabled by illness or injury*; 2) *not legally recognized because contravening a regulation or law, not true because based on incorrect information or unsound reasoning*, with the former being a special sense of the latter⁸⁷, both originated from Latin *invalidus* (meaning “*not strong*”).

It is this perceived ambiguity that sparked unwanted connotations, seemingly referring to the disabled as people who are “*not valid, not applicable, fallacious, not to be counted with*”, etc. As has been demonstrated in the text so far, the politically correct modern English alternative for “*invalid*” is “*disabled*”. However, there is a notable discrepancy of this term’s perception in the United States and the United Kingdom.

⁸⁵ <http://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm>

⁸⁶ http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/invalid_2?view=uk

⁸⁷ http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/invalid_1?view=uk

A special form of politically correct linguistic prescriptivism aiming to avoid subconscious dehumanization of people suffering from disabilities arose. It is called the “*People-first language*”, suggesting that behind each disability, there is a person to be acknowledged when talking about disabilities, rather than the disabilities themselves⁸⁸. The *People-first language* states that it is pivotal to use expressions which do not display insensitivity to people, rather than terms that have been used traditionally by the majority of society.

Not only has this specialized brand of political correctness offered a new set of inoffensive word-stock, but it also deals with syntactical issues, suggesting an altered usage of these words in sentences. When constructing utterances, the concept favours using “*to have*” as opposed to the conventional “*to be*”, e.g. a sentence like “*This person has a disability*” is preferred to “*This person is disabled*”. That is, the *People-first language* is operating on the hypothetical assumption that stating “*That person is X*” (where “*X*” stands for an adjectival expression for any disability conceivable) implies that “*X*” is an innate and inseparable part of that person. On the other hand, uttering a sentence such as “*That person has (a diagnosis of/been diagnosed with) Y*” (where “*Y*” represents a noun denoting the same) suggests rather an indirect, even somewhat weakened link between the person in question and their disability. It is noteworthy that the preference of the former is far stronger in USA, whereas British English still perceives the latter as fairly neutral and common.

In this regard, therefore, the widespread conventional usage of these terms has been strongly challenged by the people-first language in recent years. While it was common to speak about “*AIDS victims*” or “*AIDS patients*”, the proposed American usage is now “*people with AIDS*”. A person is also no longer autistic inasmuch that they “*have (a diagnosis of) autism*”. In order to reduce the negativity of the handicapped (this word still manages to retain some neutrality, by the way), people are neither “*confined to a wheelchair*” nor are they “*wheelchair bound*”, because this way the bleakness of their condition is perceived to be too obvious. The preferred way to describe their state is “*people who are using a wheelchair*”⁸⁹.

⁸⁸ <http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/libertarian/30709>

⁸⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People-first_language

Proper expressions denoting people who are not afflicted by any special mental or physical condition have also been subject to changes. It is no longer appropriate to refer to them as “*normal, healthy or typical*”, because such notions that the disabled are simply not normal or non-standard have been condemned as offensive and insensitive (despite their marginal statistical representation in a society or their actual medical condition). As opposed to “*people with disabilities*”, the proper term is quite simply “*people without disabilities*”.

Besides syntactical issues when talking about people with disabilities, several lexical amendments of the current language have been called for by both political correctness and the People-first language. The improper terminology includes pejorative terms as follows:

People with physical disabilities resulting in mobility restrictions were commonly described as being “*crippled*”, “*quadriplegic*” (a paralytic medical condition when a person is deprived of partial or total use of their limbs and torso because of an injury or an illness), or even “*disfigured*” (mainly in case of missing limbs or a significant appearance alteration). They are both to be dropped and replaced by “*a person with an orthopaedic disability*” or “*a person with altered/changed mobility*”. The former is preferred because of potentially offensive, yet rather uncommon objection that words such as “*changed*” or “*altered*” clearly denote a certain deviation from a perceived standard, thus still resulting in excluding the disabled from the major society.

People with mental conditions were commonly described as being “*retarded*”. This term, coming from the Latin verb *retardare* (meaning “*to make slow, delay, keep back, or hinder*”), was recorded in English as early as in 1426, but had not been used in relation to mental disability until 1895, when it stood as a neutral alternative for pejorative expressions like *idiot, moron, imbecile* and their like. By the 1960s, however, it gained negative connotations as well and is now considered a dysphemism⁹⁰. The term “*mentally ill*” is accepted neither, because the standards of the People-first language, appropriate terms should be syntactical objects (which “*to be mentally ill*” is not, as opposed to “*to have a mental*

⁹⁰ https://www.mhcinc.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=10352

disability”) or post-modifications (and thus “*a mentally ill person*” is disfavoured to “*a person with mental disability*”). Both British and American English adopted the word “*special*”, extending its original meaning in order to describe individuals with so-called “*special needs*” (a term used in clinical diagnostic of people requiring assistance, often referring to matters of education⁹¹).

Sensory disabilities are somewhere halfway through between mental and physical ones: they are caused by somatic abnormalities (although there are usually none visible on the outside of the body), but affect specific parts of a person’s functioning, usually in relation to their brain (although intelligence as such is intact)⁹². People with no or reduced vision and those suffering a partial or total loss of hearing were traditionally called “*blind*” and “*deaf*”, respectively (there are of course three other distinct methods of perception: taste, touch and smell, but their deprivations is fairly uncommon and arguably are not serious and life-complicating enough for the society to pay much attention as in the case of the two predominant disabilities).

Since such short labels easily attract negative connotations over time, political correctness suggested several alternatives to be used instead – specifically, visual impairment and hearing impairment. Although these terms have been introduced in order to display sensitivity to those who are affected and to minimize offense, they were not received well by neither the blind culture nor the deaf culture⁹³, which still prefer original expressions “*blind*” and “*deaf*”⁹⁴ (or “*hard of hearing*”).

There have been no politically correct alternatives offered for color-blindness, and the original terms also remained in the names of various organizations offering support to the disabled, for example the *American Foundation for the Blind*⁹⁵. Furthermore, from the medical point of view, both deafness and blindness are denoting the extreme end of the respective disability’s scale, and thus hearing impaired and vision impaired are umbrella terms covering all the levels of reduced sensory perception⁹⁶.

⁹¹ <http://psych.org/MainMenu/Research/DSMIV.aspx>

⁹² http://www.eeo.nsw.gov.au/guides/employ_able_resource_guide/sensory_disabilities_-_sight

⁹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaf_culture

⁹⁴ <http://www.deafandhh.com/>

⁹⁵ <http://www.afb.org/>

⁹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaf#Quantification_of_hearing_loss

There are many other specific disabilities, most of them being transcribed into politically correct terms usually with the help of words such as “*impaired*” or “*disorder*”. The People-first language deems it inappropriate to refer to people with bulimia or anorexia, for example, by the actual name of the illness, and prefers using the comprehensive term “*eating disorder*”⁹⁷.

In order to promote the braveness which people with disabilities display in their misfortunes, compound expressions with the word “*challenged*” (as in “*mentally or physically challenged*”) have been introduced⁹⁸, perhaps in order to present the disabilities as obstacles which the disabled have to overcome, and thus earning the respect of the major society.

Summary:

Although the syntactical changes proposed by the *People-first language* trend have achieved only limited success so far, politically correct expressions coined with the use of “*disorders, challenges, conditions*” and their like are used almost exclusively in public texts as well as in private language, and thus can boast about unprecedented frequency (in comparison to the cases of other discriminated social groups). This can be explained by an increased effort to minimize offence to those who are disabled or suffer an illness: of all the other social groups, this is the only one that – apart from being discriminated or described with the use of inconsiderate language – experience real physical or psychological pain and obvious uneasiness.

However, not all words of the newly proposed lexicon have been received so well: especially the terms related to sensual deprivation are regarded as needless exonyms by many who still prefer to be called with traditional expressions such as “*blind*” or “*deaf*”.

The syntactic amendments sought after by the *People-first language* managed to achieve rather limited success so far, since the concept is actually quite new. However, it has been on the rise since its first proposal in the 1980s and is observed especially in the United States, rather than United Kingdom.

⁹⁷ <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

⁹⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/challenged>

III.5 The Problem of Religion and The Matter of Faith

It is rather surprising that the current non-offensive tendencies also found their way to the modern language through religious matters, which are as such devoted to sharing peace (ideologically, although not that much historically). That is, the special lexicon of religions bears no offensive word-stock whatsoever.

Given the previously mentioned cases of politically incorrect expressions, one would expect negative connotations to ensue and swarm around any term denoting a person who is openly professing any other denomination than is standard in their region and therefore belongs to a social minority, which might be looked down upon and discriminated. However, no such degrading of a word has been observed yet, even though there are dozens of larger or smaller subcultures pursuing their own idiosyncratic belief systems in each major society.

Not even atheists, who naturally have no church organization whatsoever, had the misfortune of their name being reduced to something offensive. It is true that being a member of the atheist community (if one can even speak about there being such a community – atheism is far too individualistic for that) bears a certain social stigma in the current United States: the Gallup poll mentioned in the previous chapters clearly suggests that atheists are the least favourite from the selected groups, and that the sole fact of being an atheist would be a reason sufficient enough for many people to deny any presidential candidate their vote. However, the word “*atheist*” itself was hardly affected by this resentment and as such is perceived as offensive by neither side of the quarrel.

And it is not the only surprise in this matter.

There are just a few certain expressions regarding the most sacred persons, items, or institutions of faith – mainly those professed by Christians (God, Jesus, Heaven, Hell, damnation) – that are subject to certain controversies. That is, they are used as curses by general Euro-American public; although not necessarily by Christians themselves, to whom this dehonoring abuse of sacred words comes as

blasphemy, sacrilege or mere insensitive slander. Furthermore, the second commandment explicitly forbids taking God's name in vain.

Restraining from using these expressions as curses and offenses is certainly considered as being politically correct. However, as was stated in the introduction, this thesis is not concerned with this matter since they do not in any way include connotations of discrimination of any kind. And yet, there are other lexical issues that sparked significant controversy.

The main problem is presented in calendar dating, which is – albeit used as an international standard – exclusively Christian. Religious freedom was one of the main political issues in recent history: people in many countries fought for the right to believe what they want (and not having to conform to their state religion) and for all faiths being treated equally. Because of this successful historical development, the current dating system clearly prefers one option to all others, which qualifies as discrimination. For the up-to-date distribution of major religions and belief systems among the countries around the globe, please refer to the *Appendix #4* of this thesis.

There is at least a couple of tens of different calendars known, either archaic or those that are currently in use. Most of them agree on the same system of chronological units (the length of hours, days, months, years) that are given by astrology based on ancient, yet rather precise facts observed in the Solar system. However, there are several significant discrepancies as to the actual beginning of the dating (the so-called year 1): certain major civilizations differ in the event which they consider the most significant for their people, thus constituting the point from which they start counting years. All the “starting events” were given religiously and the civilizations in question correspond to the world's three largest belief systems: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

The internationally accepted civil calendar and the worldwide dating standard are based on the Gregorian calendar, the latest of the many Christian calendars used throughout history. The dating of this epoch is counted from the conventional birthdate of Jesus Christ, which was established retroactively by a Scythian monk, Dionysus Exiguus, no sooner than in the sixth century

(specifically in the year 525). This served as the basis for the Gregorian calendar, decreed and named by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. In succeeding years, it was adopted by the most of Christian countries at that time; however, several countries did not convert their dating system before the 20th century – mostly those whose denomination is that of the East-European Orthodox Church, such as Turkey, Greece and the then USSR which accepted the Gregorian calendar in the 1920s (which is why the Soviet October Revolution – undertaken on 25 October 1917 – is annually commemorated on 7 November⁹⁹).

It is however noteworthy that Exiguus designed this dating system in order to compute Easter festivals and the birth of Jesus was merely calculated with a little help of guessing. Today's scholars and historians (who are open to the notion that Jesus was a real historical figure, that is) agree on the year Christ was born to be the year 4 before Christ¹⁰⁰. Despite this, the conventional dating is still accepted and used, since it would be virtually impossible to change.

Not only is the current year computed from the birth of the central figure of Christendom, but the designation of the dating system is also based on this belief system. The two parts of the calendar split (the years before his birth and the years after it) are called B.C. and A.D., respectively. The abbreviation B.C. means "before Christ" while A.D. stands for "Anno Domini" (sometimes found in the irregular form "Anno Domine"), which comes from Medieval Latin and is translated as "in the year of the Lord". It is noteworthy that some people mistakenly interpret A.D. as "After Death" (i.e. the death of Jesus)¹⁰¹, but that notion would require postponing the date of the original year some 30 years backwards.

Although the actual year numbering can hardly be changed, the identifiers can – and there have been calls for non-Christian alternatives preferred by those who desire terms not explicitly related to the Christian conceptions of time.

Despite the fact that such calls are aimed against Christianity (which is usually not perceived as an institution connected with discrimination by general public)

⁹⁹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/history/european/russianrev/section5.rhtml>

¹⁰⁰ <http://bible.org/article/birth-jesus-christ>

¹⁰¹ Ryan (2000), pg. 15.

might seem a bit shocking, it is actually logical. Christianity is by far the main religion of the whole Euro-American civilization and compared to it, other belief systems (including atheism) are professed by mere minorities of population. And since it is minorities who traditionally tend to be discriminated, political correctness strives to protect them.

Thus, new designations have been coined to serve as neutral alternatives for the ones based on religion. The conventional split of time to two parts remained in the same point of presumed birth of Jesus for conventional and pragmatic reasons. However, the abbreviations have been changed from B.C. and A.D. to BCE and CE, respectively. They are usually spelled without fullstops and come after the number. CE simply stands for “*the Common Era*” and BCE denotes years “*before the Common Era*”.

In his essay published on 28th June 1999 and entitled *Common Values for a Common Era: Even as we cherish our diversity, we need to discover our shared values*, it was immaculately argued for by the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Anan: “*The Christian calendar no longer belongs exclusively to Christians. People of all faiths have taken to using it simply as a matter of convenience. There is so much interaction between people of different faiths and cultures - different civilizations, if you like - that some shared way of reckoning time is a necessity. And so the Christian Era has become the Common Era.*”¹⁰²

Since the matter of faith is a very sensitive one, this change sparked the most opposition from all the changes to the language proposed by the politically correct movements. Christianity (especially Catholicism) is based mainly on traditions: it finds it rather hard to compromise its position and give up anything from their belief and moral system, as can be observed in its stance towards contraception, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, abortions, euthanasia, etc. Some Christian apologetics even find the change of the date identifiers offensive. Nevertheless, the usage of BCE/CE notation in American textbooks, newspapers and academic as such writing has been growing ever since the proposal¹⁰³.

Furthermore, CE and BCE actually offer a trade-off, since the letter C is rather universal: not only can it stand for the Current Era (or the Common Era,

¹⁰² <http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/1999/19990601.unsgsm19990601.htm>

¹⁰³ http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl?id=2005_3864650

alternatively), it is also known – ironically enough – to stand for the “Christian Era” as well. There has been little dispute about the latter coming back towards Christianity, because there simply is a difference between the reasons for this era to be depicted as Christian: either because of the neutral and objective historical tradition (since Christianity played a major role in the history of our civilization) or because of the tentative and subjective religious devotion.

According to both the Current Era and the Anno Domini dating system, the current year is identical – 2009. However, Christianity is not the only belief system that served as the base of calendars.

The designation used to label years in the Hebrew calendar is the “*Anno Mundi*” (Latin for “*in the year of the world*”). The identifiers are abbreviated AM (or A.M., alternatively) and the years are numbered from one year before the presumed date of the Creation of the world, calculated by Rabbinical reckoning. The current Hebrew year is 5770 AM (it began at sundown on the evening of September 18, 2009 CE). On a sidenote, science currently gives an estimate for the date of the beginning of the Universe to be roughly 13.7 billion years ago¹⁰⁴ (according to measuring the speed at which the Universe expands), and according to evolutionists, the supposed date of Creation based on biblical calculations happened “*after the domestication of the dog*”¹⁰⁵.

The Islamic calendar begins with the year during which the Hijra, i.e. the emigration of the Islamic prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, occurred. The years after this event are designated either H for *Hijra* or AH standing for “*anno Hegirae*” (Latin for “*in the year of the Hijra*”). A limited number of years *before Hijra* (abbreviated BH) are used to date events related to Islam, such as the birth of Muhammad in 53 BH. The current Islamic year is 1430 AH (it began approximately in the evening of December 28, 2008 CE).

Both the Hebrew and Islamic civilizations use a duplicate dating system: besides their own traditional calendar, they use the Christian dating as well for the pragmatic purpose of convenient communication with the rest of the world. In fact, Hebrew lessons have been known to already use the “*Before Common*

¹⁰⁴ Hawking (1996), pp. 23

¹⁰⁵ Dawkins (2006), pg. 7

Era/Common Era” notation for more than a century¹⁰⁶. Furthermore, in Israeli and Arabic daily newspapers, both the traditional local dating *and* the Christian dating are displayed next to each other (see the Israeli *The Jerusalem Post*¹⁰⁷ or the Saudi *The Arab News*¹⁰⁸), usually without any dating identifiers whatsoever.

That all matters of calendar making were traditionally under complete control of religion and/or mythology (although being based on the observances of the Solar system, all the heavenly bodies used to carry and still carry names of gods and other deities) is observable in yet another aspect: the names of days of the week.

It should be noted, however, that the sources of the names are two: religious and numeric. In certain languages, the titles of the days etymologically came from the actual position of a day in the week (e.g., being the first, the second, the third, in the middle, at the end, etc.), and thus are purely secular.

Nevertheless, the English language clearly uses a religious source, specifically the Norse mythology and the Anglo-Saxon paganism. Although Sunday and Monday were named after the Sun and the Moon, respectively, the other days were devoted to major medieval Nordic gods. Tuesday got its name after Tiw (the one-armed god of battle and pledges), Wednesday was inspired by Wodan (the chief god, later known as Odin), Thursday was devoted to Thor (the god of thunder), and Friday was named after Frigga (the foremost goddess and the prophetic queen of Asgard, the capital city of the Nordic gods). Saturday is the only day whose name is not derived from Nordic mythology, since its roots come from Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture (Roman gods later served and still serve as the source for the universal names of the planets of our Solar system, which was never the case of Nordic gods).

The same actually applies to the English names of the months of the year, although the origins of which are manifold and – apart from all being of Ancient Roman origin – are far from stemming from a united system. Currently used English titles of months come from the Gregorian calendar, and thus it is no wonder that many of them have been named after Ancient Roman gods:

¹⁰⁶ http://www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl?id=2005_3864650

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.jpost.com/>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.arabnews.com/>

specifically, January was devoted to Janus (also spelled Ianuarius, alternatively), the god of the doorway; March has got its name after Mars, the god of war (obviously, the very same after which the fourth planet of our Solar system was named), May stems from Maia (not a Roman goddess, but a Greek one – specifically that of fertility), and June was the month of Juno (the wife of Jupiter, the foremost goddess in Roman mythology, equivalent to more famous Greek Hera).

February originally comes from the widespread ancient ritual of purification (etymologically stemming from the Latin *februus*, meaning “purification”, most likely denoting a clean start of the agriculture year after the winter had passed). A later Roman god Februus personified both the month and the ritual, and thus the god is named after them and not vice versa.

The etymology of April is a dubious one. Traditionally, the notion comes from the Latin verb *aperire* (meaning “to open”), possibly an allusion to the spring season in which flowers and trees begin “to open”. Another suggestion points to the fact that this month was sacred to Venus (the Roman goddess of love), and thus the connection of April and the goddess’ profane Greek equivalent Aphrodite emerges as a probable etymological link with significant potential of being true.

The origins of the rest of the month titles are purely secular. September, October, November and December all come from Latin numerals meaning the seventh, the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth, respectively, which derived from their position in the course of the year. Note that the Roman calendar originally consisted of ten months only; only in 753 BCE two other months were added by King Numa Pompilius (these were January and February). Centuries later, specifically in the year 8 BCE, today’s July and August were renamed after perhaps the two most famous Roman Caesars (Julius Caesar and Augustus, respectively). Before that, the titles of these two months were also numerical (Quintilis and Sextilis – meaning the fifth and the sixth, respectively).

Despite the fact that the English names of the days and some of the months are clearly based on religion (as is the whole calendar dating), the political correctness movement so far expressed no interest whatsoever to make any changes to them in order to further promote a language that is neutral religion-wise. This might be because the names of both the Nordic and the Ancient

Roman/Greek gods came through significant modification and their “legacy” is not very clearly visible. Besides this intransparency, professing both mythologies and worshipping their gods has been discontinued long ago (it passed to Scandinavian folklore during the High Middle Ages). The mentioned names of the planets of our Solar system, originated exclusively from the names of Ancient Roman deities, have never been suggested to be subject to any changes so far. Because of the displayed fervour of political correctness, however, attempts to them being changed in the future, albeit unlikely, cannot be ruled out completely.

Summary:

The proposed change of the dating paradigm is actually the only issue which came from the clash of political correctness and religion. This is given by the overall inoffensive nature of faith and also by minimal linguistic discrimination related to religious language. Nevertheless, the single change is rather major and controversial, as it goes against Christianity in an otherwise predominantly Christian environment and because it aims to abandon a long-time tradition centred around the largely worshipped pivotal figure of the Western world’s belief system. Thus, the change of the dating indicators has been only partially successful to this day and their use is contextually bound. In scientific texts, the newly created secular indicators are used, whereas religious language retained the traditional ones. Public media use both and the decision is solely their own, as is the case of private language. Interestingly enough, *Wikipedia*, the online open encyclopaedia, which was founded with the idea of almost any user being able and encouraged to edit and create almost any entry, provides a good proof of this fact: articles related to religion and faith still use the AD/BC indicators, whereas the authors of scientific texts on the very same portal progressively changed the dating system to CE/BCE. Usage in the rest of the entries alternates.

Although several other religion-specific expressions can be found in current English, so far they have not been and they most likely will not be the subject of the politically correct scrutiny. Especially changing the current calendar (both the year and the terminology) seems very unlikely today, for it would result in many difficulties, given our globally interconnected data network.

III.6 The Problem of Ageism

Political correctness naturally strives to defend other minorities than those based on gender, ethnicity or religion, such as those which somehow deviate from the generally (and quite subjectively) perceived “standard” of appearance, preference or other traits.

Since the life expectancy is growing rather steeply in the majority of the developed countries thanks to the scientific advances in medicine and overall healthcare (as of 2004, residents of the United States have the average life expectancy of 77.8 years at birth¹⁰⁹), the numbers of people of higher age have been growing significantly in recent decades. Given the alarming decrease of the numbers of children born each year (especially in the Western world), they are presenting an important part of the Euro-American demography, and it is therefore only logical that they have successfully begun to demand their right to be treated equally even after their retirement, when they usually cease to be economically active.

Their discrimination from the labour market is obvious: their skills, both mental and practical generally tend to fade away with proceeding age and the inevitable (yet in some cases very slow) deterioration of the human body and brain. This is why – despite usually rich working experience and technical expertise – they are eventually replaced by younger workers with unwithered minds and fresh knowledge of the state-of-the-art technology. However, it should not justify the inconsiderate mistaking of the elderly for incompetent and senile hindrances which are to be put aside and tolerated until their inevitable demise.

Because of what has been said above, it is no wonder that discrimination and prejudicial connotations have amassed around the word “*old*”. Political correctness, naturally, aspires to remove them by replacing this term with inoffensive synonyms. Of those, the following have managed to be used the most

¹⁰⁹ [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/06.pdf#027](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/06.pdf#027)

frequently: “*senior citizens*” (or in short, “seniors” – from Latin *senex*, meaning “old”) and “*the elderly*”¹¹⁰ (“elder” is an archaic Old-English morphological predecessor of “old”, having been superseded by it in the 16th century and also having the historical denotation of an important post¹¹¹). In the United States, senior citizens have their own special online news service called the *Senior Journal* published by *New Tech Media*¹¹² or a national non-profit online community resource “*for senior adults, children of the senior adults, and other caregivers, advocates and professionals*” called the *Senior Citizen’s Bureau*¹¹³.

Summary:

The problem of ageism is reflected in today’s language by a very limited lexicon only, since it is related to just one aspect – that of age. Therefore, the influence of political correctness has been minimal, and yet almost completely successful. The newly coined expressions are used in public language and the media almost exclusively.

III.7 The Problem of Sexual Orientation

There is an on-going discussion regarding the origins of homosexuality or bisexuality. The biggest and still unanswered questions concern with whether non-heterosexual behaviour is congenital, what exactly has to happen in one’s brain or DNA in order for one to be born homosexual, and to what extent can a person influence their own sexuality during their life. There are many scientific theories, but the evidence is inconclusive so far.

Although we are not certain about the genotypal development of homosexuality, we can – to a certain degree – trace it historically if we look at past *zeitgeists*. The

¹¹⁰ <http://timesfoundation.indiatimes.com/articleshow/4959014.cms>

¹¹¹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=elder%2C+eldest>

¹¹² <http://seniorjournal.com/>

¹¹³ <http://www.seniorcitizensbureau.com/>

earliest western documents about homosexual behaviour come from Ancient Greece, where romantic and sexual relationships between an adult male and an adolescent male was not only tolerated, but considered natural or even praised for its paedagogic benefits or as a means of population control (for example in the works of the two already-mentioned Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle¹¹⁴).

With the rise of Christianity in Europe, however, homosexuality has been condemned ever since; it was regarded as a dangerous deviation, outlawed in many countries and punishable by death. Only in the latter half of the 20th century, homosexual life style has been legally acknowledged as a legitimate preference and same-sex couples succeeded in having been granted some rights of heterosexual couples. However, in the Middle East and other countries, homosexual behaviour is still punishable by life imprisonment or carries the death penalty. Even in the Western world, in countries which have recognized the freedom of sexuality, there is much dispute between the members of the community and the representatives (not only) of the Catholic Church, stemming from the scriptural condemnation of homosexuality by the Holy Bible and Vatican. For a map depicting the up-to-date legal stance of all the countries around the world towards homosexuality, please refer to *Appendix #5* of this thesis.

Out of all possible “non-standard” sexual preferences, homosexuality (and bisexuality) was the only one to have been decriminalized and to have ceased to be regarded as a deviation, because it has been acknowledged that private acts do no harm to anybody (as opposed to pedophilia, zoophilia and their like). And thus, the LGBT community (the acronym stands for “*lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender*”¹¹⁵) has been recognized and demands its right not to be discriminated legally.

However, since homosexuality was traditionally a matter too unseemly to speak of, not many terms have been coined to describe it. The most prevalent expression – besides the original, purely scientific term *homosexual* (from Greek, meaning “*of the same gender*”) – is the word “*gay*”. It arrived to English around 12th century from Old French “*gai*”, originally meaning “*joyfull, bright, carefree*”.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/presssite/metadata/epl?mode=synopsis&bookkey=3631097>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.glbthistory.org/about/index.html>

Later on, it gained some negative connotations in 17th century and was used in the sense of “immoral”¹¹⁶. Only from the 20th century on, it started to be used to describe homosexual behaviour and so far this word is considered neutral and inoffensive, and is embraced by the LGBT community (as can be observed from its name).

Because of the historical connotation of “immoral”, however, and since the word “gay” is increasingly used to describe something unflattering or rubbish¹¹⁷ (you can say that something is gay – meaning stupid, lame, boring or unworthy – with no relation to homosexuality whatsoever), it might be a matter of time when this term stops being perceived as neutral and the negative connotations prevail to such extent that the word will be marked as politically incorrect.

There is a modern antonymy of the word “gay”, obviously denoting heterosexuals and describing them as “straight”. This term, however, is considered rather informal (perhaps even a slang expression), and – contrary to “gay” – is highly unlikely to appear in public language or political speech codes.

Terms like “fag” (a masculine noun, denoting a gay man, short form of “faggot”), “dyke” (a feminine noun, denoting a lesbian) or “queer” (an adjectival equivalent of “homosexual” in general) are highly controversial depictions of the LGBT community, with the nouns being downright derogatory slurs, while the said adjective (originally meaning “strange” or “weird”) is somewhat generally accepted when used by members of the LGBT community themselves. Therefore, the term “queer” is acceptable as an endonym. For example, *Queer Eye* is an American reality show¹¹⁸ (from the third series titled *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) where a team of five openly gay men perform a makeover on a usually straight man and offer him advice on his wardrobe, house decoration, lifestyle and such. In the United Kingdom, a non-profit organization run by and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people publicly goes under the name *The Queer Youth Network*¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁶ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=gay>

¹¹⁷ http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article671972.ece

¹¹⁸ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0358332/>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.queeryouth.org.uk/community/>

Summary:

To remind the reader of the two requirements needed for the political correctness to start the process of banning inappropriate word-stock: 1) the society's awareness level must be sufficiently high for the majority to care enough to consider treating a minority equally, and 2) there have to be expressions considered neutral by the majority, but discriminating by the minority; while the former is a vital pre-requisite for the latter. In case of homosexuality, the first requirement has been met only partially, political correctness still fights for the rights for this minority on a legal and moral "battlefields", rather than on the linguistic one. Plus, since homosexuality has been a taboo matter for more than 1500 years, and thus not spoken about publicly, there were next to no terms coined by the public to depict members of this community; and when they were, they had little time to gain negative connotations which political correctness would demand to be banned.

The best option is not to mention a person's sexuality at all, unless it is relevant to the situation or necessary for the message to convey such information.

IV. The Reception of Political Correctness

IV.1 The Criticism of Political Correctness

As has been stated in the introduction, the concept of political correctness is rather heterogenous and not an organized effort of an interconnected network of activists and the defendants of minorities. Not even its reception in the Euro-American academic circles and media has been universally positive.

The opponents of the ideology highlight several points of interest in which they do not exactly see eye to eye with its proponents. Here is a list of the major objections towards political correctness, supported with comments by published sociologists and linguists.

One of the objections is regarding the aggression of the concept, as stated by William S. Lind in paper entitled "*Political Correctness: A Short History of an Ideology*", where she complained that "*While some Americans have believed in ideologies, America itself never had an official, state ideology – up until now. But what happens today to Americans who suggest that there are differences among ethnic groups, or that the traditional social roles of men and women reflect their different natures, or that homosexuality is morally wrong? If they are public figures, they must grovel in the dirt in endless, canting apologies. If they are university students, they face star chamber courts and possible expulsion. If they are employees of private corporations, they may face loss of their jobs. What was*

*their crime? Contradicting America's new state ideology of 'Political Correctness'.*¹²⁰”

Another acknowledged objection to political correctness is its obvious restriction of free speech as argued by Douglas Kellner in his preface to *Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness*, which according to him gives a “detailed account of the corporate sponsorship undergirding the culture wars and the right-wing attack on the so-called ‘politically correct’ zealots who are allegedly attempting to impose the edicts of political correctness on unassuming students and curtailing freedom of speech and inquiry in their efforts to legislate ‘correct’ thought and language.”¹²¹

In her paper called *Cultural Sensitivity and Political Correctness: The Linguistic Problem of Naming*, Edna Andrews comments on the rather vague connection between language and thought suggested by the theory of linguistic relativity (dubbed the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”) She also mentions the heterogeneous nature of the concept: “Such vocabulary management necessarily raises questions about the potential connection between language and thought, as well as speculation that word usage in some fashion may control or change behaviour. Furthermore, it lumps together under one rubric various types of phenomena.”¹²²

Joel Bleifuss discusses the arguable usefulness of the concept, somewhat seemingly failing in fulfilling its goal when a newly coined expression is discarded as an exonym, or when a perceived politically incorrect term is otherwise still used by members of the social group the endonym denotes – especially when it comes to ethnonyms. In his *A Politically Correct Lexicon – Your ‘how-to’ guide to avoid offending anyone*, he questions the meaning and the success of several representatives of the proposed newspeak:

“Native American - Some Indians object to the term, seeing it as a way to linguistically eradicate “Indian” and thus the history of their oppression by

¹²⁰ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2674655/Political-Correctness-A-Short-History>

¹²¹ Kellner (1998), pg. 16

¹²² Andrews (1996), pg. 4.

whites. I almost always hear Native American, and in the more enlightened conversations there is usually 'indigenous' thrown in there somewhere. (...) Native American seems to be a more distant construction, developed by academics.“

„Nigger: “It is a word that white students struggle with and black students use pretty freely,” says Hill. “Young people are much more open to using it, especially young people who are black or who have been exposed to more diverse groups of people.“¹²³

In his profoundly critical essay, Augustin Blazquez goes as far as calling political correctness “*The Scourge of our times*”, arguing that “...Political Correctness remains just what it was intended to be: a sophisticated and dangerous form of censorship and oppression, imposed upon the citizenry with the ultimate goal of manipulating, brainwashing and destroying our society.“¹²⁴ His most concerns are about the danger of double standards, i.e. not only protecting selected social groups against discrimination, but also giving them unfair advantages and prominent position. This is called „positive discrimination“ and is as unequal as the regular kind.

That the ideology of political correctness might be overreaching its limits is discussed by Alexandra Blair, an Educational Correspondent to *Times Online*. She gives an example when: „Instead of singing “Baa baa, black sheep” as generations of children have learnt to do, toddlers in Oxfordshire are being taught to sing “Baa baa, rainbow sheep. The move, which critics will seize on as an example of political correctness, was made after the nurseries decided to re-evaluate their approach to equal opportunities. (...) It’s really sad. Children for generations have loved and enjoyed nursery rhymes and it’s very sad if adult political correctness doesn’t allow them to grow up in an unbiased world.“¹²⁵

¹²³ http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3027/a_politically_correct_lexicon/

¹²⁴ <http://archive.newsmx.com/archives/articles/2002/4/4/121115.shtml>

¹²⁵ http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article738220.ece

IV.2 Reception by Media

To stick to the leitmotif of presidential elections, set up by quoting the Gallup poll in the previous chapters, a series of newspaper articles about the latest US elections with unprecedented results could serve as a good source of evidence of the political correct language manifesting itself in the media.

When Barack Obama was chosen by the Americans to become the 44th president of the United States and assumed office on January 20, 2009 as the first person of African-American descent ever, media all over the world naturally had to report on this event because of its importance. However, many felt it necessary to mention the exceptional fact of Obama's ethnicity, which of course was a matter of unprecedented sensation.

Out of 27 studied articles, 6 of them used the politically correct term "*African American*" exclusively, 6 preferred the original word "*black*" solely, 8 used both expressions, and 7 authors restrained from using either, with no mention of Obama's ethnicity whatsoever. Out of the eight articles which used both, 4 used the term "*black*" in a neutral way and in the headline only (for the purpose of drawing attention to the sensation and because of the far shorter length of the word, which is very convenient for spatially-limited headlines, as discussed in previous chapters); and in the other 4 articles, the frequency of both expressions was comparably the same, arguably for the purpose of stylistic variation.

Nine months later, however, when the same Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 9th October 2009, his African-American origin only rarely came up in the media, not even as a point of interest. Out of 20 studied articles on that matter, 17 journalists restrained from mentioning the fact as they considered it irrelevant, whereas only 3 felt they needed to point out the obvious (Dan Lothian from *CNN* used the politically correct "*African-American*"¹²⁶, whereas

¹²⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/10/09/nobel.peace.prize/index.html>

Matt Spetalnick from *Reuters*¹²⁷ and Michael Binyon from *Times Online*¹²⁸ used the old-fashioned term “*black*”).

This ratio suggests that media prefer not to include the information about the ethnic origins of the people in question, unless of course it is absolutely necessary – that is, when the article itself deals with the actual problem of ethnicity specifically. The case of Keith Bardwell from October 2009 could serve as a good example. This judge from Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana, with 34-year working experience refused to issue marriage licences to mixed-race couples, not because he was racist (he claimed to have “*piles and piles of black friends*”), but because – according to his observation – interracial marriages did not last very long and because he believed that society never really accepted offsprings from such relationships.

Naturally, few journalists could report on this event without mentioning races in any way. Surprisingly, studying the articles revealed that out of the total of 15 stories, 11 of them used the terms “*black*” and “*white*” (even if only to quote the above-mentioned Bardwell’s defensive statement). Not a single article preferred the term “*African-American*” or any other newly coined expressions. This could be explained with the presumed effort of the media to bring as much attention to the case as possible, fueling the controversy of the event with comparably controversial terms. The remaining 4 authors managed to write their stories using neither of those; they stuck to words such as “*interracial*” or “*mixed*”.

IV.2 Reception by Popular Culture and in Private Language

As has already been stated, political correctness aims to change the public language and to get rid of everything which might cause offence. However, the media are just a convenient mediator and merely a means of education, as the real goal of the concept resides in changing the thinking and the private speech code

¹²⁷ <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE5981JK20091009>

¹²⁸ http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article6867711.ece

of all individuals. The extent of its success can be observed in everyday language of ordinary people and in online (publicly accessible, yet still rather private) communication on blogs, discussion forums, social network websites and their like. For the purposes of this thesis, however, neither quoting Internet sources nor transcribing private conversations is convenient or feasible. Furthermore, the online environment is usually quite intransparent and its content temporary, since it changes frequently.

However, since verbal popular culture is known for trying to depict individuals in their “natural habitat”, and thus usually has them behaving as naturally as possible, a few of the vast amount of works of art could be quoted for the sake of supporting the main idea, rather than because of trying to prove a significant point through such means. And yet, it should be noted that each obvious occurrence of the new politically correct expressions suggests an important fact: if a character honestly and in good faith uses politically correct language in a private speech, the whole concept is accepted either by them or by the author of the text. Both mean that the trend succeeded and that – arguably and if used seriously – the author believes that their characters’ speech codes will be positively received by the recipients of the text.

The works of art selected to support this idea were deliberately chosen from the somewhat low-brow category, just to show how deep the concept reaches. In order to provide the reader with evidence of the politically correct maxim being observed even in pieces which one would hardly expect to deal with such matters, a couple of low-brow books and TV series turned out to be just the perfect examples (be they considered “lowly” either for their genre, form, content, language, crude humour, or purpose). They serve as a pure consumer entertainment and are usually (although in some cases perhaps too hastily) regarded as something inferior, not worth the time or attention; they are generally perceived as something which can hardly pride itself for its intellectual values, meaningful content or educational benefits. And yet, an incredibly vast audience, consisting of millions and millions of viewers, can be found daily sitting in front of their TV sets voluntarily, being served with their favourite easy-to-digest entertainment.

Some of the selected works of art are quite modern, some are postmodern. This schism shows not only the general difference between the two, but it also offers an interesting insight to their dissimilar approach to political correctness. The former are usually rather shallow, straightforwardly pure consumer entertainment, concerned more about their form rather than their content, with generally next to no deep thoughts to speak of. The latter are somewhat elusive and far more heterogeneous: they usually deal more with their content as well as their context, offer a variety of viewpoints and tend to think meta-philosophically, frequently remarking on contemporary events and problems in a satirical way; they find it easy to make fun of themselves, often through “breaking the fourth wall” (i.e. communicating directly with the reader or watcher or otherwise disturbing the recipient’s immersion). It should be noted that every single one of the works presented below developed a massive cult following.

The classic book trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien basically established the very foundations of modern fantasy. First published in 1954, it was and still is one of the most popular work of the genre, admired for its sophisticatedly narrated story and elaborated picturesque setting. The trilogy was very successfully adopted into blockbuster movies in 2002.

One of the events in the last part of the series, *The Return of the King*, brings attention to the problem of sexism in an interesting and subtle way. One of the main antagonist’s general, the Witch-king of Angmar (also called the Lord of Nazgûl), was rumored to be invincible. In fact, a prophecy was foretold by sages of Middle-earth (the fantastical nether in which the plot is set), stating that “*Far off yet is his doom, and not by the hand of man will he fall*”¹²⁹. The word “*man*” in the prophecy presumably does not denote a male individual, since there would have to be an indefinite article preceding it (despite the somewhat archaic style and grammar of that sentence). The creator of the utterance most likely meant “*human*”, and therefore the words used clearly imply that there is absolutely no one who could slay the general, rather than that it would take a woman to kill him. Therefore, women were ignored by the prophecy as if they did not count.

¹²⁹ Tolkien (1987), pg. 332.

In the final battle of the book, when the dark general managed to strike down king Théoden on the Pelennor Fields, he was confronted by the king's niece Éowyn, a courageous noblewoman and shieldmaiden longing to win renown in battle. The Witch-king taunted her and boasted that "*no living man may hinder me,*" referring to the 1,000-year-old prophecy, to which Éowyn replied: "*But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him!*"¹³⁰ After that, she managed to kill her enemy, circumventing the exclusively masculine prophecy.

Disabilities were mentioned in one episode of the *X-Files* series, which was centred on perhaps the two most famous fictitious FBI agents, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully, investigating unexplained phenomena. When they step into a hi-tech elevator in a (in the context of that time) hypermodern building in *Ghost in the Machine* (premiere on October 29, 1993), one of the protagonists uses a newly coined politically correct expression, while the other points out its non-standard nature. This proves that in 1993, such expressions were common in use, although still not an integral and automated part of the language.

Scully: (presses a button in the elevator)

Elevator: (a computerized voice) *Going up.*

Scully: *Must be for the visually-impaired.*

Mulder: *Well, how do you like that? A politically correct elevator.* ¹³¹

In other episodes of this series, words like "*mankind*" or "*a white man*" are used occasionally with no hint of them being considered offensive, although "*singular they*" is used exclusively when referring to a person of undisclosed gender..

Politically correct expressions regarding ethnicity served as the grounds for a dialogue in of the episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In this popular TV series, a teenaged American high-school student with superhuman strength and reflexes hunted demons of all kinds and plenty of other monsters which plagued the fictitious Californian city of Sunnydale. In an episode called *Pangs* (original air date was November 23, 1999), Buffy had the following conversation about a

¹³⁰ Tolkien (1987), pg.116

¹³¹ Carter (1993).

disturbed spirit with Mr. Giles, her so-called “*Watcher*” (her tutor and father-figure guide). It is important for the point here to mention that Giles was British.

Giles: *It's clear we're dealing with a spirit of some kind. It's very common for Indian spirits to change to animal form.*

Buffy: *Yeah, well, it's plenty uncommon for me to freeze up during a fight. I mean, I had the guy. I was ready for the takedown and I stopped. And “Native American”.*

Giles: *Sorry?*

Buffy: *We don't say “Indian”.*

Giles: *Oh, oh, right! Yes, yes. Um, always behind on the terms. Still trying not to refer to you lot as “bloody colonials”.¹³²*

Several postmodern works of art also approach the matter of racism and ethnicity – in their own way, that is. For example, the British author Terry Pratchett, OBE, uses his world-renowned long-running saga called the *Discworld* to satirize today's society and to mercilessly, albeit humorously reflect traditional values, modern trends and the irrationality of the current paradigm in a mirror of parody. His fantasy novels cannot be read as classic swords & sorcery literature; they are far too cerebral, cynical and critical to be put among other book of that genre. The Discworld is not an ordinary fantasy nether: it is an allegory to our world designed to question our society where it is unexpected and mock it where it has it coming. The allegory allows Pratchett to tackle offensive matters without actually offending anyone and the fantasy setting is merely a convenient excuse to replace real-life realia with neutral fictional memes of the same meaning.

Thus, racial quarrels do not spark between black and white, but rather between humans, dwarves, trolls, etc. Technically, although they are all humanoid, these are not races (variations of one species), but independent species as such – and thus racism becomes “*speciesism*”. As explained in the novel *Witches Abroad*: “*Racism was not a problem on the Discworld, because – what with trolls and dwarfs and so on – speciesism was more interesting. Black and white lived in perfect harmony and ganged up on green.*”¹³³ (Pratchett deliberately uses the

¹³² Whedon (1999).

¹³³ Pratchett (1991) [1], pg.231.

plural of “*dwarf*” in the form “*dwarfs*”, rather than Tolkien’s “*dwarves*”, and the notion of “*the green*” refers to goblins, since there is no green race of humans.)

The term “*speciesism*” was actually not coined by Pratchett himself; it was created by British psychologist Richard D. Ryder in 1973 to denote prejudices against non-humans based on morally irrelevant physical differences¹³⁴.

The on-going hatred between dwarves and trolls on Discworld is a perfect allegory not only for interracial intolerance, but also for discriminated minorities (in a predominantly human society), even though the consciousness of the society is high enough to have enforced anti-discrimination laws. All of this is reflected in the language: dwarves are being mocked for their miniature statures, representing those discriminated on the grounds of physical appearance, and trolls who are basically walking piles of rocks represent those who are discriminated on the grounds of their origin.

The populous society of the undead (i.e. individuals like vampires, zombies, banshees, mummies and ghouls, who are past clinical death but were raised from the grave back to “life” again, usually deprived of biological needs) are not representatives of evil antagonists as is the case of ordinary fantasy fiction – they are an allegory to ageism and the disabled, who find it difficult to assert themselves on the labour market. People who discriminate the undead in favour of the living are called “*vitalists*”. Conversely, movements lobbying for equal rights of the undead exist on Discworld, mainly the “*Death Rights*” movement and the “*Fresh Start Club*”, both alligned under the same banner using the motto “*Undead yes – unperson no*”¹³⁵.

Perhaps the most controversial work of art, and thus potentially the most shocking to appear in this thesis, is the American TV series *South Park*. Almost instantly after its debut in 1997, it gained massive cult following thanks to its trademark crude animation style, coarse language and offensive black humour, as well as unprecedented wave of negative criticism inspired by the very same reasons. However, in the course of time, the show somewhat transformed and became more postmodern than the initial seasons. It still retained its provocative nature, but rather than to stir the waters with its form, it began to provoke with its

¹³⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/aug/06/animalwelfare>

¹³⁵ Pratchett (1991) [2], pg. 63.

content, using the main four protagonists, eight-year old schoolboys, to remark on dubious modern trends of American society – political correctness being no exception.

The creators of this show, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, occasionally use the opportunity to speak to the incredibly large audience of the series which gathered in the course of its vulgar beginning and to state their centre-right opinions on current issues – arguments which are fairly liberal and rational, rather sophisticatedly argued for and succinctly presented in the twenty-minute framework of the show. Since making one episode takes only about four days (thanks to the simplistic visual style), the show can comment on any issue almost instantly and it is by far the fastest and most topical series of its kind.

After the original criticism of the programme's profane nature faded out somewhat (and the creators themselves actually did move from the original infantile stories and purposeless, yet honest foul-mouthed swearing to consciousness rising regarding controversial topics), the ideological content of the show has been subject to much critical analysis. In 2008, Brooklyn College, a senior college of the City University of New York, even started to offer a course called *South Park and Political Correctness*¹³⁶.

Similarly to Pratchett's *Discworld*, the creators of *South Park* also make occasional use of imaginary, science-fiction or even downright nonsensical means of substituting real-life realia for fictitious ones. However, their presentation remains provocative and deliberately offensive nonetheless.

In an episode called *Goobacks* (original airdate April 24, 2004) a group of people travelled through time from an undisclosed year in the overpopulated future to the present in order to look for jobs, even inferior ones. Being an obvious allegory to immigrants and their situation on the labour market, their being discriminated by the residents of South Park (an eponymous fictitious city in Colorado) was unavoidable, although it is not based on ethnicity – the visitors are all humans: tall, thin, hairless, described as a “*uniform mix of all races*” of one skin colour described to be “*yellowy light-brownish whitish*”, their somewhat guttural language dubbed “*futurespeak*” being a “*complete mix of English*,

¹³⁶ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98183000>

*Chinese, Turkish and indeed all world languages*¹³⁷. The very term *Gooback* is actually a dysphemistic slur, referring to the gooey substance in which the immigrants are covered after a successful time travel; it is also etymologically derived from the verb “*to go back*” (as in “*to go back in time*”). People who discriminated the visitors were naturally called “*timecists*”.

Since *South Park* has been running for 12 years on a weekly basis, it managed to touch and satirize most of the current socio-political issues – from racism, religious fanaticism, democracy, obesity, disabilities, popular culture figures, trends, books and movies, assisted suicide, homosexual marriage, abortions, presidential elections, political figures, 9/11, the 2009 financial crisis, AIDS, goth culture, massively multiplayer online role-playing games, ageism, the homeless problem, political correctness, and much more, including political correctness and even the programme itself.

One episode called *It Hits the Fan* (original airdate November 2, 2005) supports the claims that the word “*fag*” is an endonym (as stated in the chapter *III.7 – The Problem of Sexual Orientation*), i.e. although generally perceived inappropriate and impolite, it is somewhat acceptable when used by the people referred to by the term. It should be noted that this episode deals with increasing general usage of profane language in serious mainstream television programmes and the sensationalist fascination this fact inspires among the audience.

This episode also deals with the dysphemism treadmill: that is, the fact that the S-word was eventually uttered during a prime-time TV programme in the episode meant that it officially became alright to say in everyday communication and that it ceased to be a taboo swearword. The characters in the show start using the word in public excessively and the frequency of it being said in television also increases rapidly. However, all other profanities and swearwords are beeped out by the authors themselves as a means of self-censorship, with the sole exception of the word “*fag*”, which is beeped out only when not uttered by an openly gay character (that is, only when it is offensive).

In fact, this particular *South Park* episode breaks the fourth wall (in a double-edged manner) by displaying a profanity counter, keeping count of the times the

¹³⁷ Parker, Stone (2004).

S-word is uttered by any of the characters (reaching the count of 162 by the end of the episode). Furthermore, the fourth wall is broken once again when the characters in the show actually become aware of their profanities being censored. Eventually, the residents of South Park grew tired of saying this word, because it lost its exceptional position.

Mr. Marsh: *Well, that word is getting kind of old. It's not really funny anymore.*

Man #1: *Yeah, they're gonna have to come up with a new swearword soon.*

Mr. Garrison: *Well, they can't use "fag" because you can't say "fag" unless you're a homosexual.*

Mr. Marsh: *Really? So we can't say [beeped out]?*

Mr. Garrison: *See? You got beeped.*

Man #1: *You mean you have to be a [beeped out] to say [beeped out]?*

Mr. Garrison: *That's right!*

Jimbo: *Well, that's not fair! I should be able to say "fag".*

Mr. Marsh: *Hey, you didn't get beeped.*

Jimbo: *Uh oh.*¹³⁸

From this brief, inexhaustive and admittedly, rather haphazardly assembled list of evidence of the manifestation of politically correct language in works of fiction, it is clear, nonetheless, that the maxim of minimalizing offence managed to find its way to everyday language and succeeded in gaining attention of the media and authors. It is reflected in both the private and public speech codes, with the newly proposed expressions being either honestly adopted or mockingly questioned, but acknowledged in both cases nonetheless.

¹³⁸ Parker, Stone (2005).

V. Conclusion

Political correctness is a modern concept which inspired an on-going process of modifying the current English language in a way which is presumed to create a neutral, inoffensive newspeak. On the level of linguistics, it tackles most of the sociological problems of our times, especially the discrimination of minorities such as ethnic groups, the elderly, people with disabilities, people with different religious beliefs, people with different sexual orientation, and women (who are not a minority per se, but are frequently treated as one on the labour market).

Owing to political correctness, current English lexicon is undergoing significant transformation, especially in (but not limited to) the United States of America where the concept originated in the course of the 20th century.

The ideological premise is derived from the philosophical notion of equality which itself has been an important issue for a period longer than two millenia. When the philosophical paradigm shifted in order to devote unprecedented attention to language and other vital requirements – such as sufficiently high consciousness and awareness of discriminated social groups – were met, the way was free for the proponents of political correctness to start the transformation. Given the sound theoretical background of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, it indeed did not take long before the newly proposed maxim began to manifest itself in both public and private speech codes.

The changes suggested to be made to English were plenty. Since discrimination was and still is such a big problem of today's world and because the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that through "cleaning up" the language it is possible to "clean up" the society, the impact political correctness has on modern language is vast. The framework of the newspeak thoroughly scoured today's speech codes and

mercilessly plucked out terms which caused harmful offence. Despite the fact that it was not the task of political correctness to deal with obvious profanities, swearwords, curses and other expressions which are impolite as it is, there was still so much work to be done, even though the concept concerned only with formerly neutral terms which gained unwanted negative connotations in the long run and thus became dysphemisms.

By far the most of the offensive and discriminating expressions are adjectives, be they either demonyms (names of the residents of a region derived from its name), ethnonyms (names applied to an ethnic group), or deliberately spiteful terms denoting people of old age, with different sexual orientation or with disabilities.

Through sexism, however, nouns and especially pronouns (both personal and possessive) got under the scope of political correctness and were subject to change because they were discriminating women by assigning a prominent position and by far more significance to men. Much attention was devoted to creating a gender-neutral language which should make do without needless assumptions of a person's gender – an information which is irrelevant to the vast majority of messages conveyed by texts and in speeches anyway.

Political correctness offered plenty of measures to make current English neutral and devoid of inconsiderate wordstock. Some of these measures celebrate immense success, while the reception of others has been lukewarm at best. This also stems from the fact that adhering to the maxim of political correctness is still somewhat optional in several cases (especially in the case of the Christian/secular calendar designation schizm). However, using offensive ethnonyms and obvious linguistic sexism could have dire ramifications for the speaker or writer; gender-neutrality presents by far the greatest success of political correctness.

The politically correct newspeak manifests itself basically everywhere where there is verbal communication present, both public and private. To be precise, the maxim aims to reach and change the private speech code through public language of the media and official text types, which therefore serve as a merely convenient means of education and sets an example to follow.

The language of media, journalist English, political English, the language of religion and works of fiction such as books, movies, TV series and even computer games – they all have been targeted and they all contain ample evidence of the success of the concept.

Although there are some disadvantages to political correctness (namely its not-at-all subtle attempts to restrict the freedom of speech, the problem of exonyms, and the risk of the continuous and repetitive process of the euphemism treadmill), the ideology still prevails and tirelessly pursues its tasks with little regard to its opponents.

It is uncertain whether or not political correctness actually manages to complete its goal in its entirety at some point, even to that extent that it will no longer be needed. However, since the problem of discrimination is not likely to be solved completely in the near future and since language is a continuously developing feature of the human world (English being one of the most dynamic of all languages), it is more than reasonable to prophesise that the movement of political correctness will remain active as an ever-vigilant guardian who watches over the way the western civilization express itself (and hopefully, the rest of the world will follow). And as such, therefore, political correctness is certainly worth constant attention of linguists and all those who care about one of the crucial things which makes us who we are.

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Appendices

Appendix #1 – The Chronology of International Woman's Suffrage

(the minimum voting age for all countries is 18 years, until stated otherwise)

Afghanistan	1963	Chile	1935
Albania	1920	China	1949
Algeria	1962	Cocos Islands	(a) (? yrs)
American Samoa	1990	Colombia	1954
Andorra	1970	Comoros	1956
Angola	1975	Congo (Dem. Rep.)	1967
Anguilla	1951	Congo (Rep.)	1963
Antigua and Barbuda	1951	Cook Islands	1893 (? yrs)
Argentina	1947	Costa Rica	1949
Armenia	1921	Cote d'Ivoire	1952 (19 yrs)
Aruba	(a)	Croatia	1945
Australia	1902	Cuba	1934 (16 yrs)
Austria	1918 (16 yrs)	Cyprus	1960
Azerbaijan	1918	Czech Republic	1920
The Bahamas	1960	Denmark	1915
Bahrain	1973	Djibouti	1946
Bangladesh	1972	Dominica	1951
Barbados	1950	Dominican Republic	1942
Belarus	1919	Ecuador	1924
Belgium	1919/1948(b)	Egypt	1956
Belize	1954	El Salvador	1939
Benin	1956	Equatorial Guinea	1963
Bermuda	1944	Eritrea	1955
Bhutan	1953	Estonia	1918
Bolivia	1938	Ethiopia	1955
Bosnia+Herzegovina	1949	Falkland Islands	(a)
Botswana	1965	Faroe Islands	(a)
Brazil	1931 (16 yrs)	Fiji	1963 (21 yrs)
British Virgin Islands	(a)	Finland	1906
Brunei	1959 (c)	France	1944
Bulgaria	1944	French Polynesia	(a)
Burkina Faso	1958	Gabon	1956 (21 yrs)
Burma	1922	Gambia	1960
Burundi	1961 (? yrs)	Georgia	1918
Cambodia	1955	Germany	1918
Cameroon	1946 (20 yrs)	Ghana	1954
Canada	1917	Gibraltar	(a)
Cape Verde	1975	Greece	1952
Cayman Islands	(a)	Greenland	(a)
Cent. Afr. Republic	1986 (21 yrs)	Grenada	1951
Chad	1958	Guam	(a)

Guatemala	1946	Mayotte	(a)
Guernsey	(a)	Mexico	1947
Guinea	1958	Micronesia	1979
Guinea-Bissau	1977	Moldova	1978
Guyana	1953	Monaco	1962
Haiti	1950	Mongolia	1924
Holy See (Vatican City) (d)		Montenegro	(a)
Honduras	1955	Montserrat	(a)
Hong Kong	1949	Morocco	1963
Hungary	1918	Mozambique	1975
Iceland	1915	Namibia	1989
India	1947	Nauru	1968 (20 yrs)
Indonesia	1945 (e)	Nepal	1951
Iran	1963 (16 yrs)	Netherlands	1919
Iraq	1980	Netherlands Antilles	(a)
Ireland	1918	New Caledonia	(a)
Isle of Man	1881 (16 yrs)	New Zealand	1893
Israel	1948	Nicaragua	1955 (16 yrs)
Italy	1946 (f)	Niger	1948
Jamaica	1944	Nigeria	1958
Japan	1945 (20 yrs)	Niue	(a)
Jersey	(a) (16 yrs)	Norfolk Island	(a)
Jordan	1974	Nor. Mariana Islands	(a)
Kazakhstan	1924	Norway	1913
Kenya	1963	Oman	2003 (21 yrs)
Kiribati	1967	Pakistan	1947
Korea, North	1946 (17 yrs)	Palau	1979
Korea, South	1948 (19 yrs)	Panama	1941
Kuwait	2005 (21 yrs)	Papua New Guinea	1964
Kyrgyzstan	1918	Paraguay	1961
Laos	1958	Peru	1955
Latvia	1918	Philippines	1937
Lebanon	1952 (g)	Pitcairn Islands	1838
Lesotho	1965	Poland	1918
Liberia	1946	Portugal	1931
Libya	1964	Puerto Rico	1929
Liechtenstein	1984	Qatar	1997
Lithuania	1918	Romania	1929
Luxembourg	1919	Russia	1917 (21 yrs)
Macau	(a)	Rwanda	1961
Macedonia	1946	Saint Barthelemy	(a)
Madagascar	1959	Saint Helena	(a) (? yrs)
Malawi	1961	Saint Kitts and Nevis	1951
Malaysia	1957 (21 yrs)	Saint Lucia	1924
Maldives	1932 (21 yrs)	Saint Martin	(a)
Mali	1956	S. Pierre+Miquelon	(a)
Malta	1947	S. Vincent+Grenad.	1951
Marshall Islands	1979	Samoa	1990 (21 yrs)
Mauritania	1961	San Marino	1959
Mauritius	1956	S. Tomé Príncipe	1975

Saudi Arabia	(h)	Togo	1945 (? yrs)
Senegal	1945	Tokelau	(a) (21 yrs)
Serbia	1945	Tonga	1960 (21 yrs)
Seychelles	1948 (17 yrs)	Trinidad and Tobago	1946
Sierra Leone	1961	Tunisia	1959
Singapore	1947 (21 yrs)	Turkey	1930
Slovakia	1920	Turkmenistan	1924
Slovenia	1945 (i)	Turks and Caicos Is.	(a)
Solomon Islands	1974 (21 yrs)	Tuvalu	1967
Somalia	1956	Uganda	1962
South Africa	1930 (white women) 1994 (black women)	Ukraine	1919
Spain	1931	United Arab Emirates	2006 (? yrs)
Sri Lanka	1931	United Kingdom	1918
Sudan	1964 (17 yrs)	United States	1920
Suriname	1948	Uruguay	1932
Swaziland	1968	Uzbekistan	1938
Sweden	1919	Vanuatu	1975
Switzerland	1971	Venezuela	1946
Syria	1949	Vietnam	1946
Taiwan	1947 (20 yrs)	Virgin Islands	(a)
Tajikistan	1924	Wallis and Futuna	(a)
Tanzania	1959	Yemen	1967
Thailand	1932	Zambia	1962
Timor-Leste	(a) (17 yrs)	Zimbabwe	1957 (18 yrs)

Notes: (a) Data unavailable

(b) Women's suffrage was granted in the constitution in 1919 for communal voting only. Suffrage for the provincial councils and the national parliament only came in 1948.

(c) Data applies to village elections only.

(d) No suffrage for women. Voting is restricted to Cardinals less than 80 years, women are forbidden from being Cardinals altogether.

(e) Voting is available only to those older than 17 years; married persons regardless of age.

(f) Voting is available only to those older than 18 years, except in senatorial elections, where the minimum age is 25.

(g) Voting is available only to those older than 21 years, women at age 21 are entitled to their right to vote only with elementary education.

(h) No suffrage for women, women have no right to vote altogether.

(i) Voting is available only to those older than 16 years, if employed.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

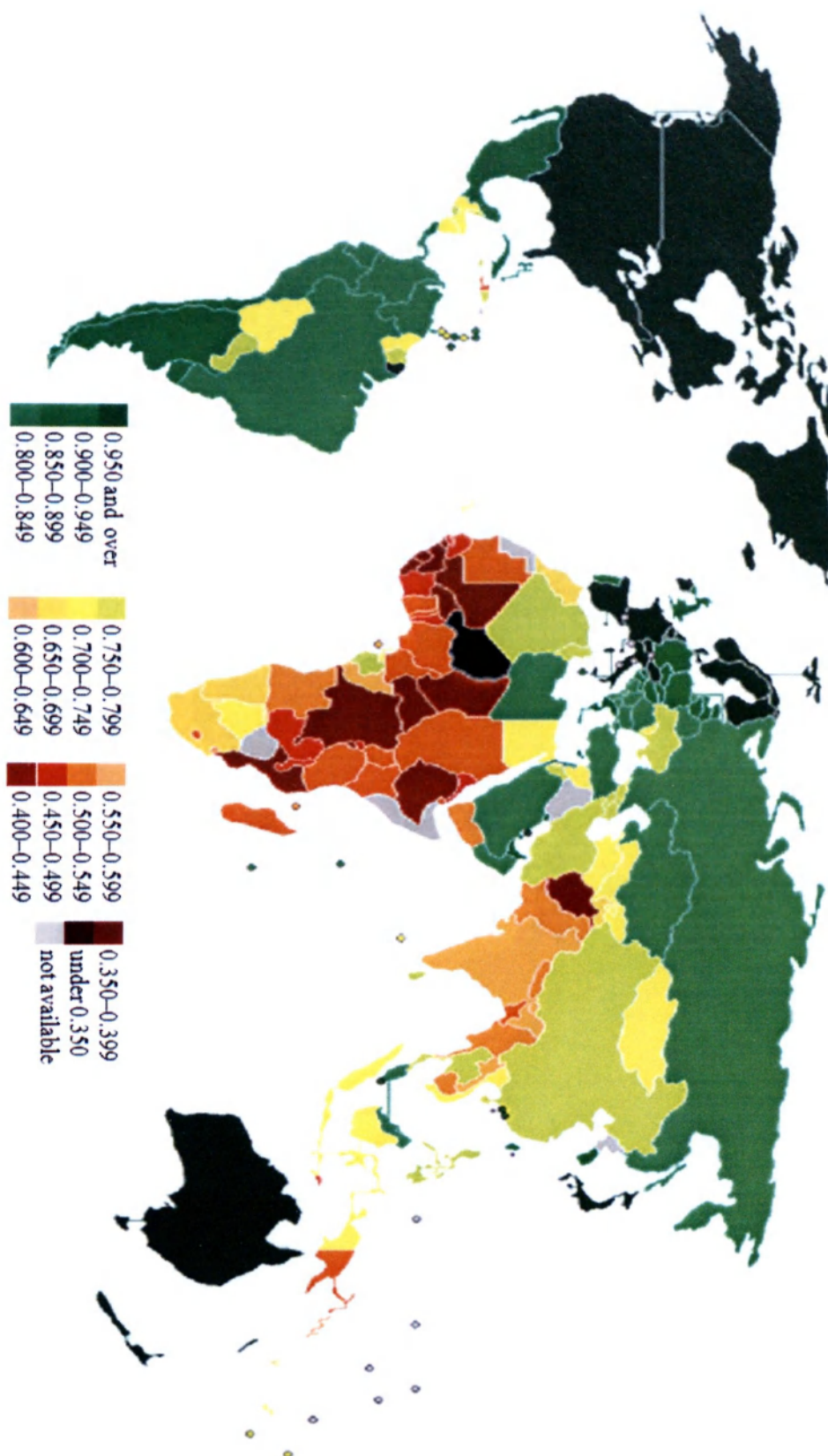
Appendix #2 – The Abolition of Slavery Timeline

(only major colonists and selected countries are listed)

- 1761 Portugal abolishes slavery in mainland Portugal and in Portuguese possessions in India, but not Brazil or Africa,
- 1794 France abolishes slavery (partly-abortively)
- 1804 France re-legalizes slavery
- 1807 Great Britain abolishes slave trade within and to the British Empire
- 1811 Spain abolishes slavery at home and in all colonies except Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo
- 1813 Argentina abolishes slavery
- 1821 Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela abolish slavery
- 1823 Chile abolishes slavery
- 1824 The Federal Republic of Central America abolishes slavery
- 1829 Mexico abolishes slavery
- 1831 Bolivia abolishes slavery
- 1833 British Empire abolishes slavery
- 1842 Uruguay abolishes slavery
- 1848 Slavery abolished in all French and Danish colonies
- 1854 Venezuela abolishes slavery
- 1863 Slavery abolished in Dutch colonies
- 1865 United States abolishes slavery
- 1869 Portugal abolishes slavery in the African colonies
- 1886 Cuba abolishes slavery
- 1888 Brazil abolishes slavery
- 1894 Korea abolishes slavery
- 1905 Siam (Thailand) abolishes slavery
- 1906 China abolishes slavery
- 1923 Afghanistan abolishes slavery
- 1942 Ethiopia abolishes slavery
- 1958 Bhutan abolishes slavery
- 1962 Saudi Arabia abolishes slavery
- 1963 United Arab Emirates abolishes slavery
- 1970 Oman abolishes slavery
- 1981 Mauritania abolishes slavery

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery#Chronology_of_abolition

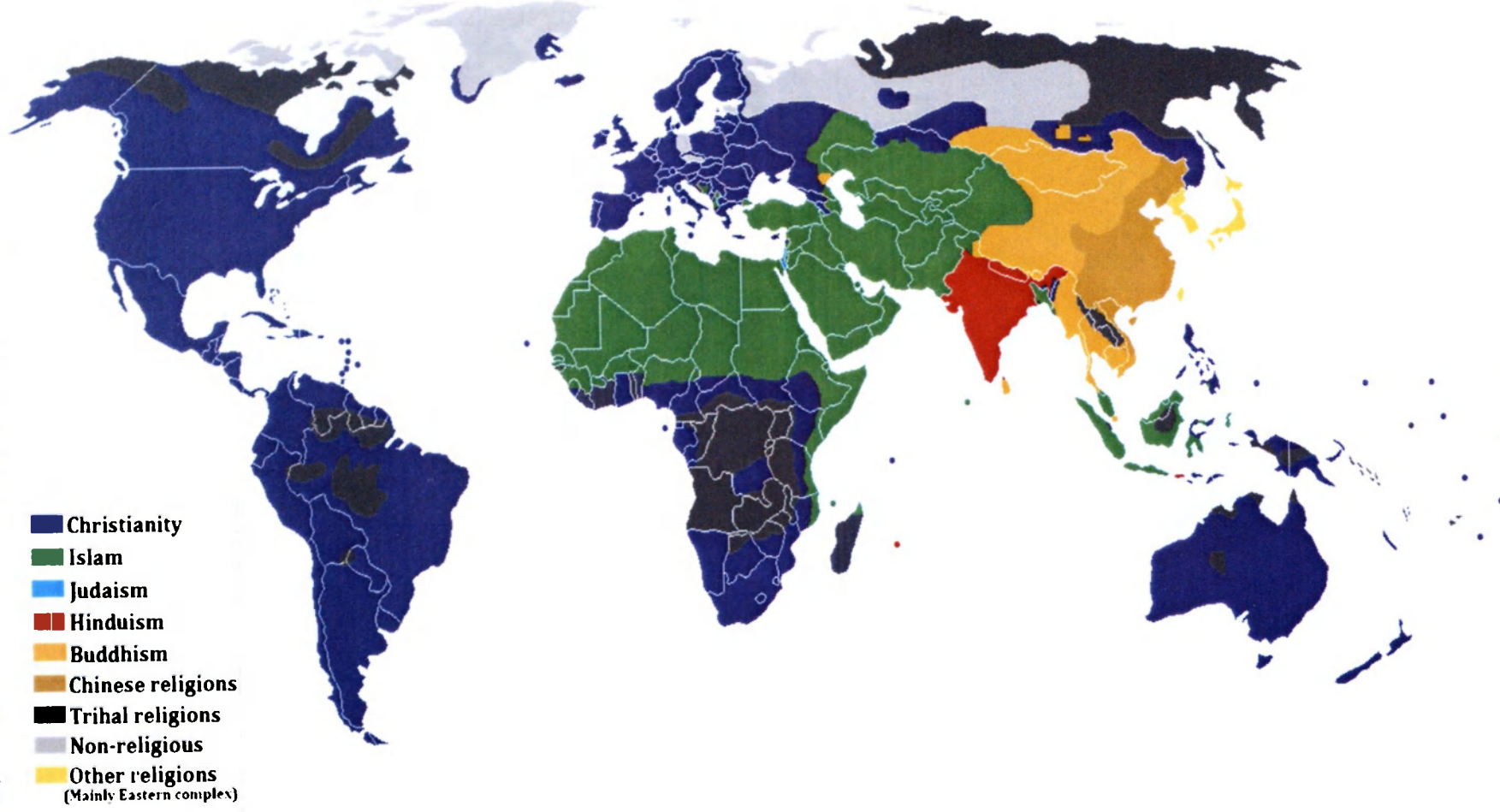
Appendix #3 – The United Nations Human Development Report of 2009



Source:

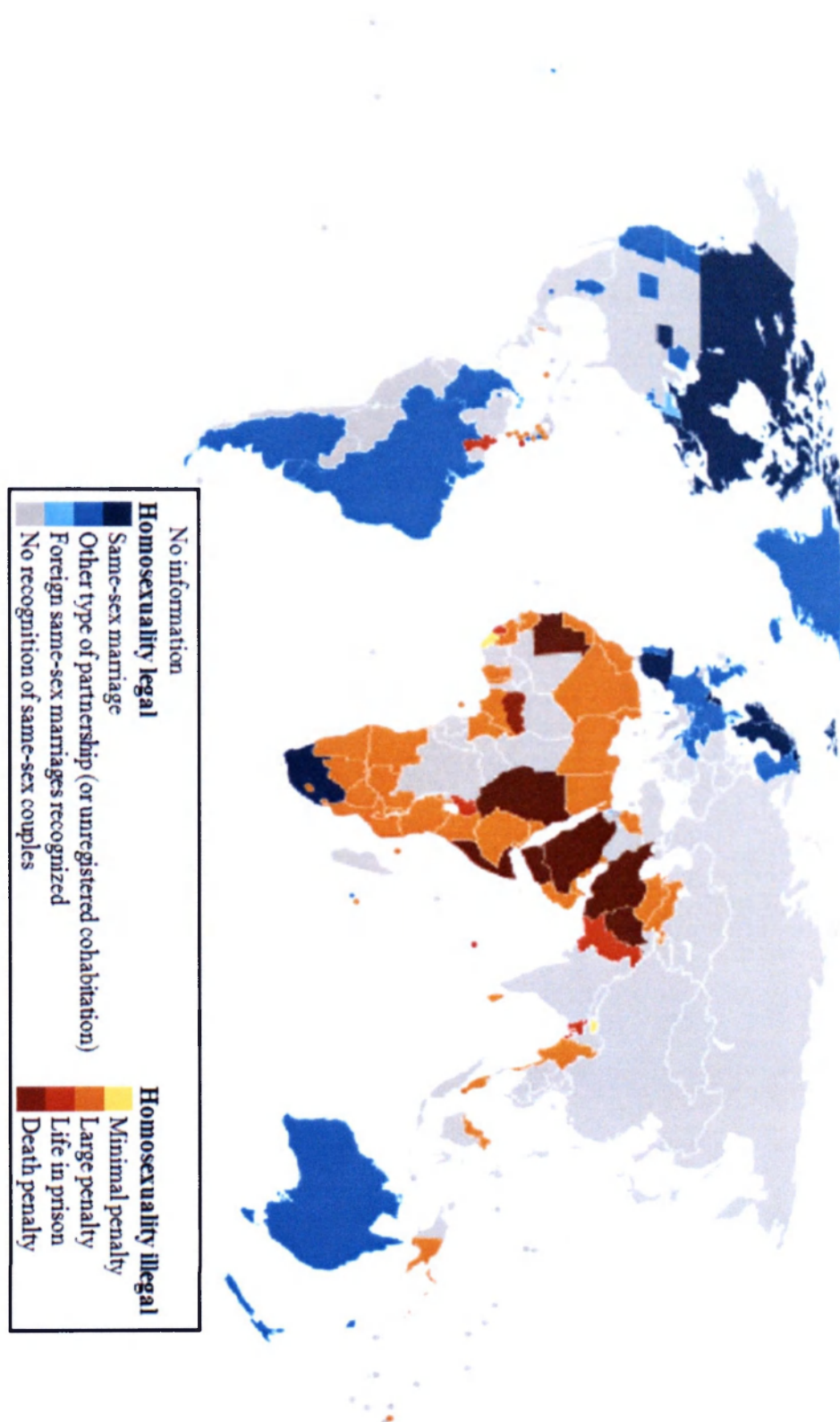
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Appendix #4 – The Map of Majority Religions in the World as of 2009



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Religion_distribution.png

Appendix #5 – Legal attitude towards homosexuality in the world as of 2009



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:World_homosexuality_laws.svg